

How Consumption of Food Became a Death-Cult

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Preface: Famine of the Soul

Mine has been a life of hunger and shame. From the earliest days I can recall, I have felt an unspeakable guilt in the simple act of eating. While others thanked God for their daily bread, I secretly

trembled, convinced that every bite I swallowed was a tiny sin, a defilement that would stain me from the inside out. I learned to fear the dinner table as one might fear an altar of sacrilege—each meal a ritual of desecration, every mouthful a blasphemy offered up against my will. In a world that survives by consumption, I found myself terrified by the price of living: the constant need to ingest, to take in, to be tainted by matter and desire.

I have often wondered if something inside me was broken or simply different from birth. Other children devoured sweets with innocent joy; I nibbled at mine under a cloud of dread, imagining it blackening my soul as it melted on my tongue. As a boy I would sit at supper, pushing peas and bits of meat around my plate, trying to delay the inevitable act of consumption. The smells that made others' mouths water made my spirit recoil. I felt that by eating I was letting the outside world invade and corrupt the sanctum of my body. The body — that alien vessel I was cursed to inhabit — hungered and cried out for sustenance, but to feed it felt like bowing to a tyrant or making a pact with the Devil. I feared that by indulging the flesh, even in this basic necessity, I was slowly destroying something pure and tender within me.

Desire itself became my enemy. The first pangs of hunger in my stomach were not mere physical signals; they were the whispers of a tempter, an inner devil urging me to sin. And hunger was only the beginning, the most primal of urges. I soon sensed a kinship between the craving for food and other forms of longing that plagued my adolescence — the blossoming appetites for pleasure, for touch, for the warm rush of human connection. These were all bodily desires, natural perhaps to others, but to me they carried the stench of something rotten. In my eyes, each desire of the flesh threatened to drag my soul into decay. A bite of food could be the first step down a spiral of indulgence; a single taste on the tongue might awaken a glut of other lusts and impulses, opening a gate within me that I was afraid to see opened. To embrace any of these desires felt like letting in rot, like welcoming spiritual decomposition.

So I made a sacred pact with emptiness. If indulging brought me to my knees in shame, abstinence might offer salvation. I began to

treat my hunger not as an enemy but as a kind of purifying fire. Every skipped meal became a small triumph, every hunger pang a prayer. I found a strange comfort in the lightheadedness that arrived by afternoon, a clarity in the trembling of my empty limbs. The less I fed my body, the more weightless and ethereal I felt — as if I were more spirit than skin, floating inches above the ground. Emptiness became my guardian. I wielded starvation as a mystical shield against the world's impurity, a way to keep the defilement at bay. In denying my body, I imagined I was strengthening my soul, armoring it in the translucent, fragile purity that only abstinence could afford.

My reflection in the mirror became a testament to this private religion of famine. Cheekbones sharpening, ribs emerging like the ridges of some sacred relic beneath my skin — each protruding bone was an icon of my devotion. I wore my gauntness like a hairshirt, as if my physical deterioration could scourge away the unseen moral grime I carried. There was a perverse pride in it. The smaller I became, the holier I felt. Society taught me to fear death, to preserve my life at any cost, but society never felt real to me. What was real were the nightly battles waged in the pit of my stomach and the quiet ecstasies of victory when I refused to surrender to hunger. In those moments of denial, I felt untouchable, clean, almost saintly. It was as close to grace as I could get: an unearthly tranquility that blossomed in the absence of sustenance, a peace that came from courting death rather than avoiding it.

Yet I would be lying if I said this path brought unbroken peace. More often it brought me to the brink of despair. The body does not relinquish its needs without a fight. On the nights when weakness draped itself over me like a shroud, I would lie in bed, heart skittering, my thoughts a feverish jumble of pride and terror. Dizzy visions swam before my eyes — sometimes I saw myself from above, a pale wraith curled on the sheets, clutching my empty belly. I felt outside of myself, dissociated and drifting, as if the hunger had lifted me out of my own flesh. In those moments I wondered: was this transcendence or merely self-destruction? Was I a penitent monk nearing enlightenment, or a madman courting his demise? I wavered between believing I had found a truth and fearing I had lost my mind. The line between survival and suicide blurs when the very act of living — of eating, of nourishing — is poisoned with such fear

and reverence.

I learned to live in this liminal state, neither fully in the world nor fully apart from it. Alienation became my constant companion. I watched others as through a pane of glass — family gathered around a dinner table, friends sharing laughter over lunch — and I felt like a ghost at a feast. I would sit among them, performing the necessary motions with my fork and knife, all the while imagining I was somewhere far away, sealed off by an invisible wall. I was present, and yet not present; I was pretending to be human, imitating the simple joy of a meal while feeling only horror at the motions. Dissociation was my shield when starvation alone was not enough. In order to survive among others, I became adept at vanishing in plain sight. My body remained as a mannequin performing basic gestures, while my mind fled to a place where impurity could not follow. This is how I endured the shared meals, the relentless ceremonies of eating that society insists upon. It was a survival instinct as much as a spiritual one — a way to preserve some last shred of self when the world tried to force its way in.

In the quiet hours of the night, however, there was no need to pretend. When I was alone with my thoughts, the full weight of my condition settled in. I saw clearly the paradox that defined my existence: I believed that to eat was to sin, yet to live one must eat. Life demanded a continual offense against my conscience. In the daytime I made my compromises in tiny bites and sips, enough to stave off collapse while hating myself for each swallow. By night I vowed anew to purify myself, to repent through emptiness. It was an endless cycle of indulgence and penance played out on the scale of crumbs, a daily liturgy of guilt. Every morsel of bread was like a sacrament turned on its head — not communion but corruption. I prayed in reverse, seeking deliverance from the very sustenance I consumed.

How does one reconcile such a divide? I teetered on the fulcrum between two hells: the hell of the body and the hell of the soul. To nourish my flesh was to starve my spirit; to starve my flesh was, perhaps, to feed my soul — or so I tried to convince myself. Each day was a negotiation with death. If life as ingestion was a kind of

moral compromise, I wondered if true purity lay only in abstaining from life itself. There were moments, in the depth of hunger, when a terrible clarity would seize me: a realization that the purest form of being would be not to be at all — to let this flesh quietly expire, free at last from need and sin. Such thoughts came gently, as an inviting abyss, a dark promise of peace. I would almost smile at the simplicity of it: the solution to the problem of eating was to cease existing as a creature that must eat.

And yet, some faint pulse of will — call it cowardice or courage, I'm not sure which — kept me clinging to this compromised life, day after day.

So I remained, a penitent in a profane world, trying to find holiness in the act of vanishing. In a society that celebrates feasting, I cultivated famine as virtue. They could not understand. How could they? To them, food is life, love, connection. To me, it became doctrine, temptation, and sin all at once. I saw the dinner table transform into an altar of a grotesque cult, where everyone worships the needs of the flesh with fork and knife, blind to the sacrifice of the spirit. I saw myself as both betrayer and betrayed: a devout acolyte of starvation trapped in the mortal church of consumption. On one side, the world beckoned me to eat without fear, to join in the breaking of bread and be nourished in body and camaraderie. On the other side, an inner voice — whether angel or devil I could not say — whispered that every mouthful was a betrayal, and that only through denial could I remain clean.

This is the torment that has defined me: the knowledge that eating feels like sin, while starvation feels like devotion. In this upside-down moral universe I have constructed, every meal is a test of faith that I inevitably fail. I have tried to sanctify the act of not-eating, to make of my emptiness a shrine where I might encounter some higher truth or purity. And indeed, there were times when the emptiness spoke. In the delirium of extreme hunger I sometimes felt I could hear the chants of a distant congregation inside my skull — a somber litany celebrating abstinence, promising redemption for every hunger pang endured. Every day without food was like ascending one rung higher on a ladder out of a pit of guilt. Every day I tasted nothing, I believed

I came closer to something like absolution.

Yet I am not so far gone that I cannot see the shadows gathering around me. My devotion courts death; my piety is one of self-annihilation. I have built a religion out of self-denial, yes, but at times a frightening question arises: have I merely found a slower, more righteous-seeming way to kill myself? And if I perish by this path of starvation, is that victory or defeat? There is a part of me that balks at the fatal conclusion of my logic — a faint voice that says life, even tainted, might hold some value beyond this calculus of sin. Perhaps it is simply the instinct to survive, or a forgotten hope that somewhere in this world there is a way to live without feeling morally defiled at every turn.

I write these words as a prelude to a darker journey — an exploration of how something as essential as eating could become entangled with the idea of evil and death in one troubled soul. My story is only one fragment of a larger tapestry of alienation and despair. In the chapters that follow, I will lead you deeper into this twilight realm where nourishment and corruption are indistinguishable, and where the desire for purity paves a road toward oblivion. Think of this not as a confession seeking absolution, but as a testament to a state of mind, a warning perhaps. There is a famine of the soul that goes far beyond the mere lack of food. I have been living in that famine, worshipping at an empty altar. If you choose to follow me here, tread lightly. The path is lit by the faint glow of a dying flame of faith, and all around is hunger: for meaning, for deliverance, for an end to the endless moral compromise that we call living.

Introduction: Lost Palate, Lost Self

I remember exactly when food lost its taste for me. One evening, seated before a humble meal, I lifted a spoon to my lips and paused. There was nothing remarkable about the dish – a soup I'd had many

times before, fragrant with herbs and simmered memories. But the first bite tasted of ash. It was as though **all flavor had been burned away**, leaving only char and dust on my tongue. In that moment, a quiet panic took root in my heart. I chewed slowly, mechanically, waiting for some hint of warmth or salt or life to bloom on my palate. **Nothing**. The food might as well have been cinders. I swallowed, and felt something like **mourning** sink through me – the subtle, unspoken grief of sensing that a vital connection had just been severed.

At first I wondered if I was ill. Perhaps a fever or virus had numbed my senses? I poked gingerly at my tongue, inspected the spoon, sniffed the broth for any sour hint of spoilage. Everything seemed normal, yet *nothing* was normal. A simple dinner had become a riddle. I took another cautious sip; it too was ash, a taste of emptiness. With each bite I felt my trust unravel. It sounds trivial – losing the taste of a meal – but it felt like **a tiny death**. The simple certainty that bread would taste like bread, that the world would meet me with the basic honesty of flavor and nourishment, was suddenly betrayed. I didn't fully understand it then, but **my palate was dying**. And as it withered, something else began to decay inside me: a faith, however naive, that the world was benign and life sustaining. In that first bowl of ashes, **my innocence of the world's purity was interred**.

I pushed the plate away that night, unsettled and unsteady. For days after, I lived in quiet terror of my next meal. **What if everything I tried to eat would taste like this – like dirt, like dust, like death?**

The prospect was absurd and yet it terrified me. When I finally grew hungry enough to try again – a piece of toast, plain and dry – I held it in my mouth and tasted only the ghost of bread. It was *not* as drastic as that first shock of ash, but still eerily bland, as if someone had scraped away the butter of life that used to coat my tongue. I found no pleasure, only texture and emptiness. Swallowing felt like a surrender. Over the next weeks I forced myself to eat out of necessity, but every mouthful became an ordeal of dread. Each meal confirmed a haunting truth I struggled to deny: **something in me had changed, or something in the world had**. The sweetness of living – once so immediate, so taken for granted – had fled. In its place remained a pale shadow of nourishment, enough to keep the

body alive perhaps, but not enough to console the soul.

Only later did I begin to grasp the **symbolism** of that lost taste. In losing my palate's trust, I had lost more than flavor – I had lost the simple faith that what I take in from the world will sustain me. Food is an act of trust. To eat is to believe in the fundamental *goodness* of the external world, to accept that the world will not poison us. When that trust dies, the palate dies with it. My **tongue's betrayal** was a herald of a deeper betrayal I was waking up to. I started to suspect that it wasn't illness or injury that turned my food to ash. It was *knowledge*. It was a creeping awareness that the world around me was not pure, not safe – perhaps not even real in the way I once thought. I had tasted **the bitterness beneath the surface**, and now every flavor carried a memory of that bitterness. It was as if my body had learned a dark secret and refused to be fooled by pleasant spices and sugars anymore. **My taste buds had become lie detectors** and every dish the world served was ringing false.

With this realization came a terrible conviction: **impurity kills**. I couldn't shake the idea. It started as a half-formed fear, then crystallized into a grim mantra that echoed in my head whenever I lifted a fork. *Impurity kills. Impurity kills.* I found myself examining each morsel of food with suspicion, as if evil were a spice that could be sprinkled on a stew. I wondered about the unseen hands that prepared my meals – not just the cook's hands, but the countless others along the way. The farmers who might have cursed under a blazing sun, the factory workers aching and resentful, the merchants and marketers with dollar signs in their eyes. **What thoughts and torments had touched this food before it reached my plate?** I imagined every grudge, every envy, every cruelty from farm to table leaching into the ingredients like a spiritual toxin. My dinner was a **sacrifice on a hidden altar**, and I could no longer pretend it was innocent. Eating had become, in my mind, a **violent moral transaction** – a final unwitting act that allowed the world's impurities into my very core. And once inside me, who could say what that impurity would do? It felt lethal in the abstract, as if each bite carried the decay of countless souls, ready to bloom into sickness inside my gut.

I began to notice how people **feed on each other** in subtler ways, and the metaphor of consumption spread beyond the dinner table. At a crowded café, I watched two friends sharing cake and whispers; their smiles sweet, their eyes sharp. They traded gossip like desserts, savoring each tart remark about a mutual acquaintance not present. I saw how one friend seemed to glow at the other's misfortunes, as if **nourished by the sad details** of someone else's life. It struck me that we consume *more* than food when we sit together. We devour reputations, **feast on each other's secrets**, sip at each other's confidence or insecurities. In polite company, we call it conversation. But under the surface it can be predatory, a banquet of egos. Even **affection can be parasitic** at times – a friend clinging to you for emotional support yet offering nothing in return, slowly draining your spirit. I realized with a shudder that human relationships often mimic ingestion: we **take each other in**, for comfort or status or validation, sometimes chewing each other up in the process. Was it any wonder I had lost my appetite? Every social interaction now seemed like another form of eating, another risk of being contaminated or of contaminating someone else. My trust in the basic nourishment of companionship was dying just like my trust in food. Each smile could be a lure, each handshake a transaction, each embrace concealing teeth.

As these thoughts festered, **envy and mimicry** emerged in my mind as twin roots of this great rot. I looked back on my own life and saw how often I had **swallowed others' ideas and desires** as if they were my own. I had mimicked the habits of popular peers, worn the fashions of the day, laughed at jokes I didn't find funny – all to belong, to partake in the communal feast of society. It was expected; everyone does it to some degree. But now, from my alienated vantage point, it all appeared grotesque. We **consume each other's dreams** out of envy, then regurgitate a pale imitation as our life's direction. We **ape the ones we secretly resent**, thinking if we digest a piece of them – their style, their opinions, their lifestyle – we might become whole or happy. Instead we only spread the infection of our own emptiness. I saw this **moral rot** everywhere once my eyes adjusted to it. It was there in the colleague who flattered the boss with dishonest praise (hoping to **ingest favor** and power that wasn't truly earned). It was there in the lover who tried to mold me into the image of someone else, as if I were a meal to be seasoned to their taste. And it was certainly in me, too – I wasn't exempt.

Realizing that hurt most of all. **The impurity was inside me as much as outside.** Every lie I told to get along, every petty jealousy I tried to hide, every time I smiled and nodded while my heart recoiled – those were *my* poisons, *my* contributions to the tainted banquet we all seemed to be attending. How many times had I dined on others' vulnerabilities to feel better about myself? How often had I been both **parasitic and host** in this great circling feast of human folly?

These revelations unfolded gradually, but their weight was crushing. My **appetite dwindled** with each new insight. What could I safely consume in a world so polluted by human malice and need? Even water, that simplest of elements, I imagined could be clouded with unseen filth – the runoff of others' despair. I found myself drawn to the idea of **fasting**, not for virtue or health, but as a desperate means of self-defense. If *impurity kills*, then abstention might be the only shield I have left. An empty stomach felt like **armor**, a sterile chamber untouched by the world's corrupt offerings. The first time I refused a meal, I felt a grim satisfaction. Hunger clawed at my belly, but there was a perverse comfort in it too – a purity in the pain. Light-headed and hollow, I felt insulated from contamination, as if **each hunger pang was a small victory over the toxins I might have ingested**. I carried my emptiness like a secret talisman. Skipping breakfast and lunch became routine. I would sit at the table during dinner with a glass of water, stirring it slowly as if it were soup, my plate conspicuously clean. Concerned voices blurred around me – family or friends asking if I was okay, if I was eating earlier perhaps. I lied with a practiced, gentle smile: *"I'm fine. Just not hungry."* In truth, I was starving – but not in the way they thought. It was not a starving for food, but for **safety**, for some assurance that what I consumed wouldn't **consume me in return**.

I started avoiding social gatherings, especially those centered on food. A simple invitation to "grab a bite" felt laden with peril and hidden expectations. Eating in front of others had become intolerable – how could I explain that **their world was poison to me now**? That I saw even their laughter as potentially tainted, each joke carrying a germ of cruelty I couldn't un-hear? I grew **suspicious of kind gestures**. If someone offered me half of their sandwich, I wondered what unseen strings attached themselves to

that act. Perhaps pity, perhaps a desire to feel generous at my expense. I sensed judgement in every glance at my thinning frame. They must think me strange, sick, or ungrateful. And perhaps I was all of those things by then. The more they urged me to *take* – a bite, a break, some help – the more fiercely I wanted to **refuse** . In my mind, **abstinence had become morality** . To say “no” was to remain untainted, to preserve the last shreds of myself unsullied by whatever corruption had seeped into everything and everyone else. I know how arrogant that sounds, how delusional. But isolation breeds its own logic. With each **lonely day** , the ideas that once seemed extreme found firm footing in my soul. I convinced myself that I was **saving myself** – even as I wasted away.

Yet even in this state of self-imposed famine, doubt gnawed at me. Late at night I would lie awake in physical ache and emotional conflict. My stomach rumbling would summon memories of happier meals: laughter over a shared pizza with friends in youth, the tender warmth of my mother’s cooking when I was small, the way a lover once fed me a slice of peach in summertime. Those recollections came with **phantom flavors** – sweet, bright, loving – that almost broke my resolve. I would find tears on my face without knowing when they’d started. In those moments I asked myself, “*Am I wrong? Is it **me** who is poisoned, not the world?*” Perhaps this conviction that impurity lurks everywhere is itself an impurity of the mind, a sickness I’ve caught. After all, plenty of people eat and love and live without feeling what I feel. They smile and joke and indulge at life’s buffet seemingly untroubled. **Why couldn’t I?** I have wondered if some part of me died or broke on that first taste of ash – some part necessary to be human and whole. In losing my palate, had I also lost my **self** ? These questions have no easy answer. On certain nights, the doubt overwhelms me, and I resolve that tomorrow I will try – truly try – to rejoin humanity’s feast, to eat with gusto and swallow my fears. But dawn comes, and I stare at a plate, and the memory of ash on my tongue floods back, stronger than any resolve. I push the plate away once more.

So I remain here, **caught between hunger and fear** , sustained by a slender thread of reluctant hope that perhaps understanding my descent will offer some release. I write these confessions from the bottom of a pit I dug myself, feeling both **victim and accomplice** to

my own alienation. There is no neat conclusion, no lesson neatly learned. I only know that what began with a single tasteless bite has unraveled into a philosophy of isolation that now governs my days and nights. I distrust the world and myself in equal measure. The palate's decay was only the beginning; the decay of trust and connection continues even now. I sometimes fancy that I can hear the world outside my window, **teeming and feeding upon itself** , while I wither in righteous abstention – a bystander to a feast I've convinced myself is fatal. Perhaps one day I will gather the courage (or the despair) to step back to the table and eat, come what may. Or perhaps I will continue to fade, proving my own dark thesis in the end. For now, I linger in this twilight, tasting nothing but my own thoughts, asking questions that only lead to more questions. This is the **famine of my soul** , the slow starvation of a self exiled by mistrust. And in this emptiness I will continue to search, wandering further down, until either I find a glimmer of truth to nourish me – or I become nothing but ash myself.

Part I The Taste of Ash;

**Bread Turned to Dust – childhood
flavours evaporate; memory becomes
the only seasoning.**

I remember being in a mental ward (and a boarding school for that matter) where a pill dulled my mind. Those medications left me sedated and detached, a fog settling over my childhood thoughts. I, as a child, had no way to resist the imposed tide of meaning – the labels and “solutions” adults pressed onto my suffering. It seems as if their awareness of my pain had been forgotten, obscured by their faith in medicine. Every problem, every outburst or sadness, was to be solved by a pill.

To the staff and doctors, it was as if there were a pill for every ill. They treated my distress not with understanding or patience, but with prescriptions. This mentality of *quick fix by medication* is sadly common. For instance, foster children are medicated with psychotropic drugs up to **13 times more** than other kids, an extreme example of adults reaching for a chemical restraint instead of addressing the child's hurt. One child advocate noted that helping these children is **“not about always trying ‘to change their brain chemistry.’ ”** He would ask doctors who touted a drug's effect, **“Who's it working for? ... It only matters whether it's working for the kid.”** In my case, it certainly wasn't working for *me*. The pill may have quieted my behavior, but it also quieted *me* – my personality, my clarity, my voice – under a chemical haze.

The illustration above depicts a brain composed of medication capsules – a symbol of society's attempt to medicate away deep-rooted problems. It highlights the futile hope that pills alone can fix issues born of stress, trauma, and social conditions. Such toxic social conditions cannot truly be cured by a capsule; the image is a reminder that this approach is fundamentally flawed.

I hate **social democracy** – or rather, I hate the complacency that can come with its well-intentioned systems. The welfare-state mindset that *meant* to care for me ended up treating me like a problem to be managed, a box to be checked off with a pill. It burns through my soul; I feel a desire to burn it all down, this whole idea that society can paper over suffering with bureaucracy and drugs. They tried to smooth out my rough edges with medication, but in doing so they ignored why I was suffering to begin with. I am not alone in this critique. Doctors have observed that we are often trying to **“medicate away what are, in fact, social problems”** – in other words, using medicine to mask issues like abuse, neglect, inequality, or family dysfunction. Antidepressants can be helpful for some, but even experts emphasize they **can't fix chronic stress caused by social problems** like debt, poverty, racism or domestic violence. My anger comes from knowing that the system's *pharmaceutical Band-Aid* never healed my wounds; it simply covered them while the infection festered beneath.

You cannot trap an eating disorder in a pill. My eating disorder wasn't some germ to be killed off with a tablet – it was a despair, a hunger and refusal deeply tangled in my psyche. It doesn't want to ingest itself; in fact, the very nature of it was a rebellion against ingesting nourishment. Forcing me to swallow pills felt like a cruel irony. Ingesting those pills only made it worse in the long run. Medications often carry side effects like mental dullness or weight changes that only layered more distress on top of my disorder. Indeed, no pill can “fix” an eating disorder at its core. To this day, there is **no medication approved** to cure anorexia nervosa, and trials of various drugs have yielded *no substantial benefit*. Doctors and clinical guidelines agree that therapy and genuine support must come first – **medications should not be used as the sole treatment** for anorexia or bulimia. But in that ward, such truths were ignored. They shoved the solution down my throat (literally), as if I were the problem to be silenced. As if by making me ingest their pill, they could make my disorder ingest itself and disappear. It never works that way. The only thing I ended up swallowing was my own voice, my pain pushed deeper inside without expression.

In the end, I am left with a bitter taste – the taste of ash. All the childhood flavours turned to dust, and memory becomes the only seasoning for the life I wasn't allowed to fully live. After all of this, after the numbing drugs and the forgotten suffering, after being told that *the pill knows best*, what am I to believe?

Hydrophobic Eucharist

I hold a glass of water and feel my stomach turn. What was once a symbol of purity now strikes me as suspect. The liquid is clear, but I cannot shake the vision of invisible contaminants swirling within. Water used to cleanse me—inside and out—a baptismal element washing away grime and sin. Now each sip feels like a violation, a compulsory ritual in a faith I've lost. It is a eucharist that brings no

grace, only doubt, a sacrament I partake in merely to survive, not to be saved.

There was a time I drank freely, unthinkingly. As a child, I ran through summer sprinklers, laughing as cool droplets blessed my tongue. I believed then that water was unquestionably good – the simplest of gifts, clean and life-giving. A glass of water offered comfort after nightmares and soothed every childhood ailment. But experience has a way of clouding even the clearest spring. Now I recall those carefree gulps with something like scorn. How naïve I was to trust that something so essential could be so benign.

It started with a subtle mistrust – a faint chemical aftertaste from the tap one day, a news report about lead and microplastics in the reservoir the next. I began to eye the kitchen faucet with suspicion. Each drop was a carrier of unseen disease, I told myself, each clear teaspoon potentially teeming with invisible threats. My rational mind knew this was partly irrational – millions drink daily without fear. Yet the thought lodged itself like a parasite in my brain: what if the purity of water was a lie? What if every glass hid a thousand microscopic betrayals? In a world so corrupt, could even water escape contamination? I doubted it, and the doubt festered.

Friends and family noticed my growing hesitation and responded with casual admonishments. "Drink more water," they said whenever I complained of fatigue or headaches or gloom. It was the cure-all mantra of those who didn't understand. Head pounding? You must be dehydrated. Heart aching? Have you been drinking enough? Their voices, at first well-meaning, began to grate on me. "Drink more water." As if all my complex despair boiled down to an empty bottle. That phrase, once a helpful reminder, curdled into an insult. It implied that my suffering was my own fault for not partaking in the most basic act of self-care. "Drink more water." In those three words I heard them dismiss my pain as trivial – a mere chemical imbalance easily righted. Over time, I grew to hate the phrase. Each repetition felt like being splashed in the face with cold water, a shock meant to wake me from what they assumed was simple neglect.

I rebelled in the smallest of ways. If water was their panacea for my ills, I would intentionally leave my glass untouched. I'd let my tongue go dry in silent protest when told my sadness might evaporate with a few more ounces of fluid. Of course, this defiance only hurt me – I'd end up dizzy, parched, sometimes feverish with dehydration. The absurdity was not lost on me: I was making myself suffer to spite a remedy I found insulting. But it felt like the only control I had.

Refusing water became a moral stand, however irrational: a way to

say that my pain ran deeper than bodily thirst, that no amount of hydration could cleanse the stain of despair from my soul.

In quieter moments, I chastise myself for this dramatization. Water itself has done me no wrong; it is I who have turned on it. I think of religious metaphors I once cherished – how water symbolizes rebirth, purity, life. There is holy water at the church door, a font I used to dip my fingers in, feeling protected. I recall the idea of my own baptism (though I was too young to remember it) – the belief that water could wash away original sin. Now the same water feels as if it carries original sin back into me, each sip a possible corruption. It's a spiritual contradiction I cannot reconcile. I thirst for purity and yet fear the very agent of purification. Water is supposed to absolve, yet I taste in it only the world's disease.

Late at night, I lie in bed with cracked lips and a raw throat. The body's demands become insistent – a headache blooming, my pulse a faint drum in my ears. A filled glass sits on the bedside table, inches away, lit by the ghostly glow of a streetlamp through the window. The water is perfectly still. I stare at it for hours as if it were an adversary or an oracle. In that silence, I can almost convince myself I see something stirring in it – a swirl of darkness, a hint of some impurity forming shapes. The longer I look, the more it feels like the water is looking back at me. Daring me. Offering itself as salvation and poison both. My hand trembles as I reach for it, caught between craving and revulsion.

"You have to drink sometime," I whisper to myself in the dark. My voice sounds like a stranger's – hoarse, pleading. The truth is I am terrified. Terrified of a simple glass of water because of everything it has come to mean. I fear that by drinking I am surrendering: giving in to the easy answers everyone else accepts. I fear that maybe they are right – that all my angst could indeed be softened by something as mundane as moisture. And if that's true, then what does it say about the great battles I thought I was fighting? To need what I spiritually reject – it feels like a defeat of the soul by the body. Eventually, desperation wins. With a feeling akin to shame, I raise the glass to my lips. The water touches my tongue – cool, tasteless, ordinary. My parched cells rejoice even as my mind recoils. It is relief and self-disgust all at once. I drain the glass in a series of gulps, each one a capitulation. In those moments of swallowing, I wonder if this is how a sinner feels taking unwanted communion: forced to the altar, kneeling and opening his mouth to receive a sacrament he has ceased to believe in. A "hydrophobic eucharist," indeed – a ritual that keeps me alive but grants no grace, no

illumination.

Afterward I feel the water settle in my gut, strangely heavy. I am hydrated but not healed. Instead of the vitality everyone promised, I sense only resignation. Lying back down, I can almost feel the water seeping into my veins, circulating through every cynical part of me. It binds me to life against my will, tethering me once more to this corrupt world. Tomorrow, thirst will come again, and with it, the same mistrust. The cycle continues: a perverse liturgy of need and refusal. In water I carry both my sin and my salvation, and I do not know which is which.

Culinary Uncanny

My tongue has learned to suspect every flavor. What once was a source of delight is now an agent of doubt. I nibble at a piece of fruit and pause, convinced something is “off” about it. Is that a hint of mold, a sting of chemical preservative, a touch of rot beneath the sweetness? I sniff like a wary animal, but smell alone can’t confirm the threat. A dish can smell delicious yet taste dead the moment it touches my tongue. It’s as if my senses are split in two – smell offers an inviting lie, while taste delivers the cruel truth. The result is a constant, uncanny dissonance at the dinner table, every meal a battleground between expectation and reality.

I wasn’t always like this. There are memories of pure, untroubled appetite: licking cinnamon sugar off my fingertips at a fair, reveling in the friendly burn of chili heat in a bowl of curry, savoring chocolate that melted like silk on my tongue. Those spices once felt like old friends, each with its own personality – the bold warmth of ginger, the comfort of vanilla, the zing of peppermint at Christmas. But now, each of them has turned hostile in my mouth. Cinnamon pricks like needles of distrust; chili powder sears with an accusation in its heat; even vanilla, that gentle flavor, tastes cloying and false. It’s as though my taste buds have rebelled against pleasure itself, mistrusting even the friends they grew up with.

Sweetness is the worst betrayer. Anything sweet – sugar in my tea, honey on toast, ripe berries – now carries an undercurrent of

manipulation. I feel the sweetness trying to seduce me, to lull me into contentment, and I resent it. Sweetness feels manipulative, a siren song offering comfort while concealing the emptiness beneath. I often find myself reaching instead for bitter foods, as if bitterness were somehow more honest. A black coffee with no sugar, sharp and biting, at least doesn't lie to me about life's bitterness. Bitter greens, sour citrus, unsweetened cocoa – these taste bitter or sour, yes, but clean in their pain. Bitterness is bracingly truthful, like a friend who tells you unpleasant news to your face. And yet, even that honesty can cut too deep; I can only handle so much before I recoil. There is no refuge in any flavor now – only varying degrees of alienation.

I think back to the first time I realized something was wrong with my sense of taste. It was a family dinner years ago, one I had eagerly awaited. My mother had made my favorite stew – rich with tomatoes and garlic, spiced with paprika and bay leaf, a recipe passed down for generations. The kitchen air was thick with a mouthwatering aroma that made my stomach rumble. But when we sat down and I took the first bite, I froze. The meat tasted faintly of soil and iron, the potatoes like chalk. I remember discreetly spitting my food into a napkin when no one was looking. It wasn't the stew that had changed; it was me. Everyone else was blissfully eating, smiling even. I chewed nothing but ashes and guilt. That night I excused myself early, claiming illness. In truth, I was terrified – the one place I'd felt safe, at our family table, had betrayed me without warning. What smelled like love tasted like death. I lay in bed afterwards, pressing my tongue against the roof of my mouth as if to scrape away the memory of that phantom ash flavor. Something inside me had cracked, and through that crack poured an ocean of distrust that I've been unable to seal ever since.

After that incident, other memories surfaced, connecting in ways I hadn't seen before. The time a friend tricked me into eating a spoonful of wasabi by calling it "green tea ice cream" – how I gagged and cried as my mouth burned, and how my trust in him burned even worse. The time I found a dead fly at the bottom of a bowl of soup I'd nearly finished, and I retched until I was empty, horrified that I had welcomed decay into my body. The polite lies at formal dinners, when I praised the host's cooking while secretly fighting the urge to wretch at a suspicious texture or smell. Each instance was a small lesson: you cannot trust what you taste; behind every flavor could lurk filth or falsehood. I began to approach every plate with preemptive caution, bracing for some hidden

unpleasantness. What was meant to be nourishment became a minefield.

People around me noticed my change in habits. I picked at meals, often choosing plain rice or dry bread – “white foods,” beige and bland, the only ones that felt safe. Seasonings became suspect; sauces were sinister, concealing who-knew-what. If someone asked why I wasn’t trying the spiced lamb or the marinated tofu, I struggled to explain. How could I tell them that every spice now tastes unclean, as if each herb and powder carries a moral stain? How could I admit that I sometimes chew every bite dozens of times, straining to detect any hint of corruption before I swallow? To verbalize these fears would sound absurd, possibly even insulting to the cook. So I kept quiet, shaking my head with a polite smile, pretending I simply wasn’t hungry or had a delicate stomach. In reality, I was starving – starving both for food and for the trust I’d lost, trapped in this private ritual of caution.

Eating, which should be a natural joy, turned into a tense performance of feigned normalcy. My tongue, once just an organ of taste, had become a judge and jailer. It judges every morsel that enters my mouth, pronouncing a silent verdict: Clean? Unclean? Safe? Defiled? More often than not, the verdict is guilty – the food is deemed unworthy, contaminated by some vague wrongness in flavor or texture. And so my tongue, acting as jailer, locks away my appetite in a prison of suspicion. I imagine it patrolling like a stern warden, ready to banish any food that cannot prove its purity. Under such scrutiny, what meal could ever pass? Even the simplest offerings are found lacking. An apple carries the bitter echo of pesticides; a piece of bread tastes of the factory, of metal and machines instead of sun and wheat. Nothing is innocent on my palate. My tongue brands every food with the label “unclean,” not just in the culinary sense but in a spiritual sense, as though the very world’s corruption has seasoned it all.

This alienation from taste cuts deeper than hunger. It is a rift between me and one of life’s fundamental pleasures. To eat is to trust, at least a little – to trust that the food will nourish and not harm, that its taste will more or less tell the truth. I find myself unable to summon that trust. Each time I try to eat with hope, something in the flavor strikes a false note and I push the plate away, heart pounding with disappointment and relief. I wish I could go back to the innocence of mindless eating, when a cookie was just a cookie and not a question mark. But that old self, who delighted in flavor without analysis, feels as distant as a dream. In my mouth now everything

turns to bitterness or dust. At times I chew mechanically on something bland and imagine I am consuming the ashes of all my past meals – all those moments of comfort now burned up and unsalvageable.

Yet I cannot stop eating entirely – the body won't let me. Just as with water, the cruel joke is that I must consume what I do not trust. So I force down what I can, usually in solitude where no one can witness my silent struggle. Each swallow is an uneasy truce between my hunger and my fear. I tell myself that this is simply how it must be: nourishment without joy, sustenance without spirit. Food has become fuel and nothing more, shorn of communion or delight – a daily sacrament I endure rather than celebrate. And so I live, caught between hunger and revulsion, longing for a taste of life that doesn't betray. Each day I ask if it's a curse or a shield, this culinary uncanny that guards my tongue. Perhaps it is both. For now, it is my reality: every meal a reminder that something inside me has declared war on the simple act of tasting the world, and in doing so, has left me famished for a truth I can no longer find in any flavor.

Part II The Theology of Impurity

The Rotten Banquet – Society's moral decay served daily on porcelain.

I sit at a dinner table that could be anywhere, everywhere. The porcelain plates gleam immaculately, arranged with performative care on a polished mahogany surface. Steam rises from a roast that glistens with juices; wine glasses catch the light as if in a staged tableau of domestic bliss. Yet all I can sense is rot underneath the aroma. The smiles around this table are polite, the conversation civil, but I feel a crawling decay beneath the clink of silverware. We are enacting a ritual of togetherness – a family dinner, a friendly meal – that is meant to symbolize harmony. Instead, I see hypocrisy carved into each courteous nod and empty phrase. It strikes me that

this meal is a microcosm of a daily charade: society's moral collapse ladled out in hearty portions, served on fine porcelain to disguise the stench.

When I was a child, family dinners were mandatory and reverent. We bowed our heads to say grace over the food, thanking heaven for the bounty, while ignoring the quiet despair that sat beside us. My father's voice would boom with righteousness – gratitude for the meal, platitudes about those “less fortunate” – even as he later berated my mother for some trivial fault after dessert. I learned early that the dining table was a stage. We performed the roles of a loving family, normal and pious, while hiding truths beneath the tablecloth. I remember chewing through green beans and roast beef with a knot in my stomach, sensing that the warmth in our words was forced. The meal was delicious, yet somehow it tasted like a lie. As a teenager I began noticing how much we avoided saying at dinner. We complimented the tenderness of the meat, but never acknowledged the tension in the air or the cruelty that had seasoned our interactions. A feast of denial: we pretended moral comfort while consuming without thought. Even the food itself bore hidden suffering we refused to see – the roast had once been a living creature, slaughtered for our satisfaction, yet we only commented on how tender it was. We praised the cook, spoke of work or school, anything to avoid the uncomfortable truths bubbling just under the surface. Each family dinner thus became a rotten banquet, a façade of harmony built atop decay. The outward form – clinking glasses, shared bread – suggested unity and gratitude, but I could taste bitterness in every bite.

I recall one particular Sunday dinner at my uncle's house. The table was set with heirloom china and silver; a large turkey sat in the center, golden-brown and perfumed with herbs. Before carving, my uncle – a portly man with a genial face – led a toast celebrating “family values and hard work.” We lifted our glasses, smiling. But I knew him too well: this was the same uncle who ran a food processing plant with notoriously underpaid workers. Earlier that year, there had been a small scandal about safety violations and cruelty in his slaughterhouse line – animals beaten, carcasses processed in unsanitary conditions. He brushed it off publicly and the matter settled quietly. Now here he was, presiding over a succulent turkey, joking that we must “eat well and thank the Lord.” I watched the knife slice through the bird's flesh and felt a wave of nausea. Everyone acted as though nothing was amiss – as though this gathering were simply a wholesome family feast. I alone sat

silent, imagining the unseen trail of blood and injustice that led to this table. The others chattered about trivial news, complimenting the food. It was all so banal. This was banality of evil made manifest in meat and wine – not dramatic or cinematic evil, but the everyday kind, the unthinking participation in systems of harm. None of my relatives considered themselves bad people; they would be offended at the suggestion. And yet, in our cheerful compliance and willful ignorance, we became complicit. No one at that table was actively cruel at that moment, and yet a kind of evil was being quietly served and swallowed without question. We dined on the fruits of others' suffering and called it "grace." It struck me that this is how moral decay perpetuates: not with fanfare, but with second helpings and polite smiles.

Hypocrisy has a saccharine aftertaste, and I could taste it that night. The philosopher Hannah Arendt once noted that of all vices, only hypocrisy truly rots a person from within. Here we were, passing the potatoes and feigning virtue, while rottenness festered beneath our polite facades. "Only the hypocrite is really rotten to the core,"

Arendt wrote, and I felt those words sticking in my throat along with the turkey. Each kindly word of thanks from my uncle rang hollow, each pious nod from my aunt dripped with unspoken contradictions. We talked about dieting even as we gorged, spoke of kindness even as we ignored the cruelty on our plates, toasted hard work while benefitting from exploitation. The room was filled with the smell of a well-seasoned roast and the laughter of family, but I felt like we were dining in a tomb – pretending the corpses aren't there with us.

Not just at home – I began to notice this rotten banquet everywhere in society. In restaurants, I observed the same theater playing out among strangers and friends. When I was in my twenties, trying to "network" and fit into adult society, I often found myself at business lunches and social dinners. These were in bustling restaurants with soft music, where I'd sit across from colleagues or acquaintances as we all played our scripted parts. We'd skim menus of extravagant options – steak drizzled in truffle oil, desserts described as "decadent" – and make light conversation. I remember one particular corporate dinner at an upscale steakhouse: the CEO raised a toast to teamwork and integrity while cutting into a bloody slab of beef. The waitstaff hovered like choreographed actors, refilling wine glasses at just the right moment in the boss's anecdote. Everyone laughed on cue at the boss's jokes, praised the excellent choice of restaurant, and voiced enthusiastic approval of the food. I too lifted my fork and smiled, mimicking their enthusiasm, yet inside I felt

disgust and duplicity. The meat was perfectly cooked, melt-in-the-mouth tender, but I couldn't stop picturing the factory farm video I'd seen recently – cows packed in squalor, their suffering carefully hidden from the diners who delight in their flesh. My colleagues either didn't know or didn't care. To express moral qualms in that setting would have broken the spell of normalcy. So I chewed and swallowed my principles along with the steak.

These restaurant rituals are a kind of social contract: we agree to indulge together and reassure each other that it's normal. The conversation stays comfortably shallow – sports, weather, office gossip – anything to avoid reflecting on what or whom we are consuming. We compliment the chef's artistry in plating the dish, ignoring the ethical rot underneath. It's a sleek performance of prosperity and pleasure. Everyone is performing the role of the satisfied consumer, the savvy patron. There's even an artifice of concern sometimes: how often have I heard someone at a fancy dinner remark, "This is so indulgent, I'll have to diet tomorrow," with a laugh? Such a statement acknowledges guilt just enough to sound humble, yet ultimately excuses the overindulgence. It's all part of the show. We perform moderation even in excess – an added layer of hypocrisy, as if acknowledging gluttony absolves us of it. I realized that in these settings, consumption itself is theater. The diners dress up, the food is arranged like props, the restaurant's ambience is stage lighting. And we deliver our lines: delicious, well-prepared, thank you, just one more bite. It is grotesque when I step back and truly see it. But most of the time, none of us step back. We stay in character, playing our parts in the rotten banquet because to do otherwise would make us pariahs at the table.

What makes it all the more insidious is how ordinary it feels. There's a concept I read about – the "banality of evil," describing how ordinary people commit or enable horrific acts by simply going about their routine, never questioning. Eating, I realized, is perhaps the most banal of all routines, and thus the perfect cover for evils great and small. We all have to eat, after all. So we easily hide our moral lapses there. Overfishing the oceans, wrecking rainforests for cattle ranches, exploiting child labor on cocoa plantations – these grand atrocities are folded into the simple act of having dinner. Who wants to consider all that while enjoying a meal? And so we don't. We cultivate a selective blindness. We focus on the presentation – the porcelain plate's elegance, the food's flavors – and block out the chain of consequences. In doing so, we become like actors who refuse to look backstage, lest the ropes and pulleys ruin the magic

of the show.

I have witnessed public rituals of consumption that make this hypocrisy even more glaring. Think of festivals and holidays: lavish Thanksgiving feasts, Christmas dinners, Easter brunches. Ostensibly these are celebrations of gratitude, love, or faith. Yet how often do they devolve into orgies of overeating and performative piety? One Thanksgiving, I volunteered at a community center to serve free meals for the poor before attending my own family's feast. The contrast haunts me. At noon, I was ladling gravy onto paper plates for people who hadn't eaten properly in days. By evening, I was seated at a polished table where a grotesque abundance sprawled before a well-fed family. We spoke about being thankful and even mentioned the less fortunate briefly – a perfunctory nod – before digging in. I looked at the platter overflowing with food (so much that we'd have days of leftovers) and suddenly felt I was part of a cruel pageant. The words of grace we uttered were rehearsed lines; the sentiment of gratitude, largely hollow. After seeing true need earlier that day, my relatives' cheerful complacency made my skin crawl. When my grandmother urged everyone to eat seconds because we have plenty, it struck me that this was the very problem. We have more than plenty, yet who among us would forgo any of it for those with none? Our feast was in fact a façade of harmony, built atop the decay of inequality and indulgence. No one at the table was overtly malicious – they were kind people in many ways – but we participated in a moral decay that is so widespread it feels banal. The banquet itself had become an idol; we worshipped it with overeating and false grace, even as the values it was supposed to uphold – charity, humility, genuine thankfulness – withered outside the dining room door.

In such moments I feel a profound alienation. I sit among them – family, friends, society at large – and I play my assigned role, but inside I feel like a traitor or a spy. My smile is as fake as the harmony we pretend to share. The others perhaps sense nothing amiss; they continue chatting about recipes or the day's small dramas. I, however, am lost in the symbolism of it all. The tablecloth might as well be a burial shroud; the centerpiece of flowers cannot mask the odor of moral rot that I imagine wafting from the kitchen. I poke at my food, and sometimes I catch myself in the act of performing normalcy: I hear myself laughing politely at a joke, or complimenting the cook, and I shudder internally. How easily a person can live a lie at the dinner table. How effortlessly we all collaborate in this theater of denial.

Gluttony and cruelty are dressed up in respectable clothes here. On the surface, nothing seems wrong: people are fed, smiles all around. But consider the deeper narrative. We live in a world where some die of overeating while others die of hunger – isn't that a mark of moral collapse? Consider how much waste these grand banquets produce, how many animals are killed, how many workers toil invisibly for our constant feasting. Society at large feels like one decadent banquet where the elite dine to excess, indifferent to the moral implications. I think of ancient Rome's tales of decadence. The Stoic philosopher Seneca once described the excess of his time with biting clarity: *"They vomit so they may eat, and eat so that they may vomit"*. That line echoes in my mind whenever I see news of eating contests (people stuffing 50 hot dogs in their mouths for applause) or witness partygoers binge-drinking and then coolly making themselves throw up just to indulge more. We laugh or shrug it off – just fun, just food – but it's a disturbingly apt metaphor for our whole culture. We consume mindlessly, even harmfully, and then find ways to consume more, whether by purging or by numbing our conscience. Gluttony feeds on itself. As one early Christian thinker observed, *"Gluttony is hypocrisy of the stomach. Filled, it moans about scarcity; stuffed and crammed, it wails about its hunger"*. Indeed, our society always hungers for more even when gorged. We pile our plates high, then complain we are not satisfied. The stomach is full but the soul is empty, and so we keep shoveling in pleasures as if to fill a void that only grows. This is the hypocrisy at the heart of the rotten banquet: the pretense that endless consumption can bring satisfaction or virtue. We know better, deep down, yet we play along.

I've seen families (my own included) eat themselves into a stupor at holiday dinners – afterwards everyone groans about how stuffed they are, joking they could burst. It's treated as a badge of honor that we indulged so much. Meanwhile, the deeper emptiness – the lack of real connection, of moral purpose – is ignored. We would rather loosen our belts and sink into couches in a food coma than face the actual source of hunger in us. That source, I suspect, is spiritual or emotional. But facing it would be uncomfortable, so instead we have another helping of pie.

Sometimes, sitting at these dinners, I felt an almost surreal detachment – as if I were a ghost observing humans feasting at a funeral, heedless that the corpse is their own decaying morality. I recall a particular wedding banquet I attended: it was lavish, with course after course of gourmet dishes. The bride and groom looked

radiant; toasts were made to love and fidelity. Yet, I knew the bride's father – a wealthy businessman – had made his fortune through unethical means that ruined many lives. People whispered about it outside of his earshot, but here at the banquet he was congratulated and treated as an honored patron. He even sponsored extra desserts and champagne for everyone. I watched him, red-faced and laughing, embrace his daughter. Perhaps he truly loved her and felt proud to give her a fairy-tale wedding. But I could not forget the stories I'd heard of factory layoffs and communities devastated by his greed. It struck me as grotesque irony: we were toasting goodness and love with glasses filled by ill-gotten gains, eating decadent food paid for by someone else's misery. The guests either didn't know or didn't care; they were having too good a time. Under the twinkling chandeliers, nothing smelled of decay except to my own over-sensitized spirit. I felt like I was tasting ash in every bite of cake. When I looked at the chocolate decorations on the dessert, I thought of child labor on cocoa plantations. When the steak was served, I thought of rainforests burned for cattle. When the imported tiger prawns came, I thought of slave-like conditions on some fishing boats I'd read about. My mind kept connecting each delicacy to a hidden horror. Everyone else seemed to simply taste delicious food and delight in the celebration. I envied them, in a way – how much easier to enjoy life's banquet without this moral nausea. But I could not unsee it. The banquet was rotten. Society's collapse – its cruelty and excess – was right there on our plates, if one only had eyes to see.

The evening ended with applause for the happy couple and compliments to the chef. I applauded too, outwardly, but inside I felt a heavy despair. Driving home, I rolled down the car window to gulp in fresh air, as if I could purge the atmosphere of the banquet from my lungs. The night air was cool and clean compared to the stifling perfumed dining hall. I remember whispering to myself, something is very wrong with us. How have we come to accept this as normal – this daily pageant of consuming without conscience? The banality of evil indeed: it's in the everyday meal, the casual lunch, the routine snack. It's in the way we don't think about what or who we consume. It's the thoughtlessness that frightens me, even more than active malice. Because if hundreds of millions of us can participate in harm just by not thinking, by following the script, then evil doesn't need masterminds – it just needs waiters to keep serving and diners to keep eating.

I often felt powerless to change any of this. I tried becoming

vegetarian for a time, then vegan, thinking that might cleanse some hypocrisy from my own plate. It did ease a corner of my conscience, but the rotten banquet is not just about meat or no meat – it's about the whole mindset of consumption in our culture. Even at vegan potlucks I attended, I saw similar patterns: smugness about our moral food, while maybe overlooking other issues (the imported quinoa picked by underpaid farmers, etc.). The rot goes deeper than individual ingredients. It is in how we approach the act of eating: as an entitlement, as performance, as distraction. Food, which could be a sacrament of life, becomes in these scenarios a tool of denial or a badge of status.

I have memories of more sincere meals that stand in contrast – a simple bowl of rice shared with a poor family during my travels, where each grain was precious and gratitude was genuine; or the sparse wartime rations my grandmother recounted, where neighbors pooled what little they had. Those meals had no spectacle, no porcelain plates, but they had a kind of honest purity. People understood the value of the food and the presence of each other. There was no excess to hide behind, no performative indulgence – just sustenance and community. In those memories (or stories passed down), I sense what a moral meal might feel like: suffused with humility and real thankfulness, mindful of each bite. But such meals are rare in my modern life. Instead, I'm surrounded by abundance laced with apathy. Society at large has not experienced real hunger or restraint in a long time. Perhaps that's why our daily feast rots – it has nothing to check it, no deeper purpose guiding it. At times, overwhelmed by this realization, I grew bitter and withdrew. I began avoiding communal meals whenever I could. Friends would invite me out and I'd make excuses. Family gatherings I'd attend under duress, eating little and speaking less. I was labeled "quiet" or "odd" for not partaking with enthusiasm. How could I explain to them that what they found comforting – a nice meal together – I found almost nightmarish? The very normalcy of it terrified me, because I alone (it seemed) could see the moral chasm it balanced upon. Of course I was not truly alone; there are many who see it, who criticize industrial farming or overconsumption. But in the immediate moment of a dinner, to be the one person who feels the weight of it while others chatter lightly – that is profound loneliness. I felt like a heretic at the communion of the devouring cult. If I spoke up – do you know what you're really eating, what you're really endorsing? – I'd spoil the meal and be met with angry stares or derision. So I stayed silent, letting the rancid knowledge gnaw at me from within.

These chapters of my life, these dinner table psychodramas, have taught me how easily humanity's worst tendencies can masquerade as civilized behavior. No atrocity seems to shock us if it arrives

Saint Hunger: Anorexia Mirabilis – Medieval fasting visions reborn in a post-industrial gut.

Hunger became my prayer. In the silence after turning my back on those decadent feasts, I found myself courting emptiness as a form of purity. What began as moral disgust at society's gluttony transformed into a personal rebellion: I would eat as little as possible, I decided. I would starve myself as a protest against the daily lies served on our plates. It felt almost righteous – a private revolt, a purification ritual of one. At first, it was just skipping a meal here and there, but soon I was deliberately seeing how long I could go without eating at all. Each missed meal felt like a small victory, a cleansing. In a world grotesquely overfed on cruelty and denial, refusal to eat took on, in my mind, the aura of a sacred act. I did not articulate it clearly then, but looking back I recognize the shape of an old pattern: the ascetic, the religious faster. I had stumbled onto a path well-trodden by medieval saints and mystics, though I came to it not through piety but through despair. I remember the strange mix of emotions in those early days of fasting: anger and sorrow gave me resolve, while a faint hope flickered that perhaps by purifying my body, I could also purify my soul of the world's impurities. I was not motivated by vanity – it wasn't about looking thin or fitting an image. No, it was something deeper and more quixotic: I wanted to be clean in a spiritual and moral sense, to feel unsullied by the rot I saw everywhere. Food had come to symbolize everything corrupt; thus, rejecting food felt like rejecting the world's corruption. People around me were perplexed, even alarmed. Friends noticed my declining invitations with "I've already eaten" lies, or pushing food around on my plate without taking a bite. My family grew concerned as I lost weight. They asked if I was feeling okay, or if I had "body image issues." How could I explain to them that my body was not the target – it was the world's image I couldn't stomach?

How to tell them that each morsel of food felt like poison to my conscience? That I derived a grim satisfaction from feeling my stomach ache and shrink, because it meant I was distancing myself from the feast of falsehoods everyone else seemed to enjoy? In secret, I began reading about others who had taken extreme paths of fasting – not the modern dieting fads, but historical accounts of those who starved for God. Late at night, in the dim light of my laptop, I encountered the term *anorexia mirabilis*, “miraculous anorexia,” describing women in the Middle Ages who refused to eat, believing it brought them closer to the divine. The stories of these medieval holy women stunned me; I felt an uncanny kinship across time. Here were young women, centuries ago, who starved themselves not out of vanity, but out of spiritual fervor and protest against the worldly. They lived in ages of excess and corruption too – the papal courts dripping with wealth, society’s injustices rampant – and their response was to retreat into the purity of starvation. The most famous of them, Saint Catherine of Siena, became my strange inspiration and companion in spirit. Catherine, I learned, had been known to fast for long periods in the 14th century. She came from a well-off family, but she renounced comfort and food in pursuit of holiness. Towards the end of her short life, the legend goes, she consumed no food at all except the Eucharist – the sacred communion wafer – as her daily sustenance. She quite literally tried to live “on God alone.” This fact struck me like lightning: Catherine ate nothing but a thin tasteless wafer given at Mass. Meanwhile I lived in a world of endless tasty options and was trying to abstain. If she could do it in the name of God, perhaps I could do it in the name of truth, or purity, or whatever vague transcendent ideal I was chasing. Catherine even defied orders from her superiors to eat, claiming divine illness or higher purpose. Here was a willpower so fierce it terrified the authorities of her time – and indeed she was criticized and urged to stop, but she persisted unto death. She died at 33, essentially of self-starvation, unable to swallow in her final weeks. They say her refusal to eat was accompanied by intense spiritual visions and ecstasies. In her starvation, she believed she was burning inside with divine love, consuming herself as a holy offering.

I confess, reading Catherine’s story gave me chills of recognition. No, I did not fancy myself a saint or feel religious euphoria – I was too skeptical and broken for that. Yet, I felt I understood something of her drive. She lived in an era where women had few means to protest or assert control, especially over their own bodies, except

through denial of those bodies. By refusing to eat, Catherine reclaimed a sense of agency and purity in a corrupt world. It was a language of resistance that those around her found baffling or mad. But to her, it was perfectly logical: if gluttony and indulgence represented sin, then absolute fasting represented holiness. Fasting denoted holiness and underscored purity in her context. For me, living now in a world of post-industrial excess, anorexia took on a similar symbolism. Surrounded by what I saw as moral filth and overindulgence, to starve was to reject it all, to declare that I would not be sustained by the poisoned bread of this culture.

My hunger became my anchor, my identity. Oddly, as my body grew lighter and weaker, a certain clarity and heaviness of purpose settled in my mind. I would wake up in the mornings dizzy, often with a ringing in my ears when I stood up – yet I also felt a grim pride: another day I managed to avoid contaminating myself with the world's food. I carried an apple or a few crackers around in case dizziness turned dangerous, but I rarely touched them. Instead, I drank water, or sometimes tea, and told myself it was enough.

There were moments that felt nearly mystical. Once, after not eating for perhaps three days straight, I lay on my bed and felt as though I were floating a few inches above the sheets. My body was so light, my head buzzed with something like intoxication. I closed my eyes and saw colors swirling behind my eyelids. In that moment I felt an unexpected peace. The usual drumbeat of anxiety and anger (at society, at myself) hushed to a faint whisper. In the silence of starvation, I sensed something like a presence – perhaps just my mind playing tricks due to lack of nutrients, but it felt spiritual. I remembered that many religious traditions have fasting as a path to enlightenment or closeness to God: Jesus fasting 40 days in the desert, Buddha fasting under the Bodhi tree, Muslim Sufis and Christian monks alike purifying the soul by denying the flesh. Was I, inadvertently, following in their footsteps? I hadn't set out to find God, only to escape the devil I perceived in modern consumption. Yet here I was, having what felt like a minor religious experience. In that floaty state, a phrase came to me: "Saint Hunger." It almost made me laugh – the idea that Hunger itself was my saint, my guiding patron. I, who could never fit in with the saints of plenty around the dinner table, had found a strange communion with the saints of emptiness.

Medieval accounts tell of fasting women experiencing vivid holy visions – angels visiting, Christ embracing them, or the Virgin Mary feeding them spiritually. I had no such clear visions, but I had

dreams. Some nights I'd dream of huge banquet halls like those I had fled, but empty, with cobwebs on the chandeliers and dust on the plates. I'd walk through the silent hall in my dream, stomach aching, and find at the head of the table not a human host but a skeleton seated, wearing a crown. I interpreted this in waking life as Death presiding over the feast of excess – perhaps a reminder of what all that indulgence leads to. Other times I dreamed I was in a desert, alone under a sky white with heat. In that dream desert I felt hunger like a character beside me – a spectral woman who took my hand and guided me somewhere. I always awoke before we reached the destination. But I'd wake up with a tear-streaked face or a pounding heart, feeling that I had been close to something profound.

Physically, the toll of my self-imposed asceticism grew. My ribs showed starkly; my cheeks hollowed. Climbing stairs left me panting. Yet I was strangely proud of each symptom – they were like stigmata, signs of my commitment. In a society of abundance, to suffer from hunger felt like proof that I was not enslaved like others. People often say anorexia (in the modern sense) is about control, and indeed there was an element of that: I controlled what I allowed into me, when so much else in life felt uncontrollable. But it was not just control for its own sake – it was control with a moral narrative. I was writing a story where I played a martyr, hurting myself to protest a greater evil. There's a dangerous seduction in that role: it can grant a sense of superiority even as it destroys you. I admit, in dark honesty, that I sometimes felt a perverse pride thinking, I have the strength to deny what you others can't. I do what none of you will do: I take the pain that you refuse to face. It was a private conceit, one I would never voice, but it whispered in my head as I watched coworkers munch on snacks or family members go for seconds. I, with my black coffee and knotted belt on increasingly loose pants, fancied myself above their weakness. Starvation became a twisted virtue, and I its zealous practitioner.

And yet, alongside that pride was profound fragility and doubt. In quieter moments, I questioned myself: Was I truly doing this for some higher purpose, or was I just broken? The world I rejected went on without me. My protest was invisible to everyone except those who worried about my health. I wasn't changing society by wasting away; I was, perhaps, just disappearing. There were nights I shivered with both cold and fear, realizing I might actually die from this path. And an inner voice – maybe common sense, maybe something divine – asked, What then? What is the point of

martyrdom that no one witnesses or understands? I didn't have a clear answer. I only knew that once I started down this road of saintly starvation, it felt impossible to turn back. To eat would be to let the world's impurity back into me, to become like the others again. I couldn't stomach the thought of returning to those smiling dinner tables, eating "normally" and swallowing all the lies. So I persisted, even as my hands trembled and my vision sometimes blurred from low blood sugar. I was determined to find some kind of transcendence in this pain.

At times I thought of the phrase *anorexia mirabilis* – "miraculous anorexia." What a strange combination of words, I thought: anorexia (loss of appetite) paired with miraculous. In medieval Europe, when a young woman wasted away from refusal to eat except for prayer, people indeed saw it as a sort of miracle or sign of holiness. In modern times, we diagnose it as a mental disorder, *anorexia nervosa*, a sickness to be treated. The same behavior, interpreted differently by eras: one as divine devotion, the other as pathological. I was intellectually aware of this, and I sometimes wondered: Am I sick or am I "holy" (in a secular, moral way)? Perhaps I was both or neither. I read in one study that Joan Jacobs Brumberg noted how if a young woman today starved herself to talk to God, doctors would still label her *anorexic nervosa*, not a saint. I certainly didn't expect anyone to call me a saint – most called me unwell. My parents begged me to see a therapist. Friends drifted away, uncomfortable with my gaunt look and joyless demeanor. I was alone, except for the historical companions in my books and the gnawing Hunger that sat with me always.

I took consolation from those medieval fasters. They felt like misunderstood allies. I learned of a woman named Columba of Rieti, who like Catherine ate only Eucharist near her end and died in her early thirties; of Angela of Foligno, who supposedly ate scabs of the sick as a form of humility and whose very smell of food made her vomit, so holy was her revulsion. These accounts were shocking and visceral – Angela gagging at food, Catherine drinking the pus of a diseased person's wound in an extreme act of compassion and self-abasement. I did not go so far (thank God), but I understood the logic: they inverted the normal order of things. What was foul (pus, scabs) they consumed to humble themselves; what was ordinary nourishment they rejected to feed their spirit. In a way, I too had inverted the normal order – I treated food as filth and emptiness as sustenance.

There's a particular story of Catherine of Siena that stayed with me:

once, a starving beggar approached her and she had nothing to give but her own bowl of soup which she'd been barely touching. She gave it away without hesitation, happy to remain hungry herself. On another occasion, offered a plate of fresh salad (rare treat), she forced herself to eat it only to immediately stick a twig down her throat to vomit it out, as if any pleasure from food had to be expelled. I felt a kinship with that revulsion. If ever I faltered and ate something out of weakness – say a piece of bread when dizziness became too intense – I was flooded with guilt and self-loathing. I never went so far as to purge by vomiting, but I would punish myself by extending the next fast, or doing exhausting exercise on an empty stomach. It was as if I believed I had to atone for the sin of eating. I realize how unhealthy this was, physically and mentally, and indeed it mirrors the pathology of modern eating disorders. But in the depths of it, I justified everything with almost religious fervor: This is penance. This is purification.

My family eventually coerced me into seeing a doctor, who predictably diagnosed me with anorexia nervosa. He spoke of therapy, refeeding, the dangers of organ failure. I sat there, skeletal in an oversized sweater, listening politely but internally unmoved. How to explain to him that my anorexia was different – that it was not born from the clichéd desire to be thin or fear of fat, but from a desire to be good in a world I perceived as evil? He wouldn't have understood; perhaps he would have called it delusion. So I nodded and didn't argue when they set appointments, but then I simply didn't show up to most of them. I was beyond their reach, lost in what I began to think of as my "fasting visions."

Yes, I did begin to think of my experiences in those terms. As my body suffered, my mind sometimes soared or dove into intense reveries. I filled journals with feverish writings – reflections on scripture (I found myself returning to religious language), on the grotesqueries of consumer culture, on my own emotions which ranged wildly from serene to despairing. At times I wrote as if addressing God, even though I wasn't sure I believed in God – "Are You there in my hunger? Is this pleasing to You? Or am I just destroying myself for nothing?" Other times I wrote as if addressing society: "You want me to play along, to eat your lies and smile. I refuse. I choose the desert over your banquet. I choose hunger over the bloated complacency you call normal."

In those journals I see a portrait of a person split between martyrdom and doubt. One entry likens my fasting to a flame: "I am an oil lamp, burning from within. Each pang of hunger is another

ounce of oil consumed to feed the fire. Perhaps when all of me is burnt, some light will have shown forth." Another entry, later, is just a scrawl of despair: "I'm so hungry, I'm so hungry, I'm so hungry," written over and over, turning into illegible scratches. There were days physical hunger roared so loudly that it drowned out the lofty purpose I'd envisioned. I would curl up on the floor clutching my abdomen, animal tears leaking from my eyes, whispering "please, please" though I didn't know to whom – God? My own stubborn will? The pain was real, and it tested my faith in my cause. On more than one occasion, I almost broke: I would find myself in front of the open fridge, trembling, hallucinating the smell of food as overwhelmingly sweet or savory. There were moments I devoured something in a frenzy – a piece of cold chicken, a slice of cake left over – only to panic and spit out the last bites, overcome by shame. Those moments felt like defeats, like I had let the world seduce me back. In their aftermath, I'd cry and furiously scribble prayers for strength to resist next time.

What was I hoping to achieve ultimately? It's hard to articulate, because it was not entirely rational. Part of me believed I was undergoing a transformation – a purification that might lead to a personal revelation. I thought maybe if I pushed far enough, I would break through some barrier and touch the truth – Logos, the divine Word, or whatever cosmic structure lay behind the seeming chaos. In religious terms, maybe I hoped to encounter God or attain saintliness; in secular terms, perhaps I wanted an incontrovertible moral clarity or a release from the pain of living in this world. I recall writing a line: "If I shrink far enough, perhaps I will slip through the cracks of this reality into a better one." It sounds like a mystic or a madwoman – and perhaps I was toggling between the two.

One evening, I went walking alone to stave off the urge to eat. It was early winter, and I was wrapped in a coat, feeling the chill acutely due to my lack of body fat. I wandered into a church – a small neighborhood chapel that was empty at dusk. In the dim light of votive candles, I sat in a back pew. The quiet was profound; my heart sounded like a drum in my ears. I hadn't eaten in two days. As I stared at the wooden crucifix at the altar, a thought came gently: Christ also sanctified hunger. The Gospels spoke of Jesus fasting forty days, being tempted to turn stones into bread but refusing, saying "Man does not live by bread alone." Those words echoed now. I had read them before without much feeling, but now tears sprang to my eyes. I whispered, "Not by bread alone..." as if it were an answer to a question I hadn't fully asked. Did I feel validated? In

that moment, yes. I felt that my hunger aligned me with something sacred – that I was, in a sense, on a known spiritual path, however dangerous. Saints and martyrs had trod this road; it was just unusual to do so in modern times. I closed my eyes and imagined Catherine of Siena standing beside me, thin and radiant, her face sympathetic. In my imagination I asked her, “Am I doing right?” and perhaps it was my own mind answering, but I heard a reply in the silence: Yes, if you do it for love.

For love. The phrase jolted me. Whom did I love in this? I had framed my starvation as protest and purification, but not as love. Maybe that was the difference between a true saint and me – Catherine starved out of love for God and compassion for a corrupt world’s salvation. I was starving out of disgust and hatred for a corrupt world, and perhaps hatred for myself as part of it. Was there love in my heart at all? That night, in the chapel, I knelt and prayed clumsily, begging for love to not abandon me. If I could transmute my hunger into love rather than anger, maybe it could mean something.

In the following weeks, this reflection softened me a little. I tried to focus not just on negation (what I was against), but on what pure thing I was for. I told myself I hungered for justice, for compassion, for innocence. Those became like my spiritual meals – I would imagine feeding on the idea of justice when physically hungry, to nourish my resolve. There’s a line I came across in a book by Caroline Walker Bynum, a scholar of medieval spirituality, that resonated: she argued that fasting women used food.

Poisoned Logos – Language, advertising, and the slow toxification of meaning.

In the beginning was the Word – or so I was taught from the Gospel of John. Logos, the divine Word, pure and creative, source of light and truth. That was the ideal: language as a vessel of meaning and clarity. But as I emerged from my ordeals and looked around at our

world, I felt that the Word had been poisoned. Language itself, the very medium through which we understand and seek purity, had become impure. It is as if every word we ingest is laced with something toxic, and we have grown sick on a diet of slogans, advertisements, and manipulations. I sometimes feel this viscerally: a well-crafted ad jingle playing in my mind can leave a chemical aftertaste on my tongue, the way artificial sweeteners do. We live amid a cloud of words – on screens, on signs, in our ears – yet rarely do those words nourish us. Most of them are empty calories, making us feel full of information or promises but leaving us malnourished in truth.

Having confronted the impurity in food and in my own body, I turned my gaze to language, the food of the mind. I realized that much of what had driven me to despair was not only what people ate, but what they said about eating and everything else. The narratives, the marketing, the constant flow of half-truths. Our culture's language around food, self, health, and virtue had become a corrupted scripture – a Poisoned Logos guiding a kind of death cult of consumption. Words that should point to truth instead serve corporate interests or social coercion. They promise nourishment but deliver control or confusion.

I recall standing in a supermarket aisle after my recovery, trying to choose a simple loaf of bread, and being inundated by labels: "All Natural!", "Whole Grain Goodness!", "No Added Sugar!", "Organic, Pure, Clean!" – each package shouting its virtues in bright cheery font. Once, I might have taken these slogans at face value, but now I saw them with cynical clarity. "Natural" labels, for instance, are basically meaningless – companies slap them on anything to lure shoppers, even on junk foods like "natural" cookies or Cheetos. The word natural has been so overused it's empty; as one report put it, such labels have no real rules and mean very little. Yet, for years I had been one of those shoppers drawn to the word, assuming "natural" equated to healthier or moral. How easily language twists our perceptions. A poisonous inversion: the more a food product shouts "PURE" or "CLEAN" on the box, the more skeptical I've learned to be. It's like the boy who cried wolf, except it's the box crying health while hiding sugar and preservatives.

Advertising and corporate branding are the high temples where this language corruption thrives. They take powerful words – love, happiness, health, freedom – and appropriate them to sell products. Over time, the words themselves erode. I noticed how the phrase "guilt-free" proliferated on snack labels and diet products: guilt-free

brownies, guilt-free chips. The implication: eating other things should make you guilty, but our product absolves you. It's absurd and insidious. As a food essayist noted, "guilt-free" treats promise an escape from guilt while actually reinforcing the idea that you should feel guilty eating the "wrong" foods. Thus the language creates the very anxiety it then pretends to soothe. What a toxic cycle: words that infect you with a sense of sin and then sell you faux absolution. The Logos – once a source of truth – is here used to deceive and bind.

I began to reflect that our whole culture speaks in a kind of double-speak about consumption. The same dessert is "sinfully delicious" in one ad and "guilt-free indulgence" in another. The oscillation between moralizing and demoralizing language is dizzying. In one magazine I saw a spread: the first page was about "clean eating" tips (implying anything not clean is dirty and morally bad), and the very next page was an ad for a rich chocolate cake labeled "naughty but nice," with the tagline that echoed an old ad campaign by Salman Rushdie – "naughty but nice" capturing that British notion that tasty food is a guilty pleasure. Our lexicon around food is saturated with moral terms: good/bad, clean/dirty, innocent/decadent. It would almost be funny if it didn't have real consequences. People like my friend – and indeed myself – internalize these words deeply. We start to feel we are good or bad based on what we consume. Language, which should liberate by naming truth, instead enslaves by imposing false judgments. It's not only food. Think of how health in general is discussed: "wellness" has become a buzzword, stretched to sell expensive supplements and yoga pants. "Detox" is used to hawk juices – implying our bodies are full of toxins and only a special regimen (sold to you for \$199) will purify you. Even the word "cleanse" – once a straightforward term – now triggers thoughts of lemon-juice diets or colon flushes, many of dubious benefit. The words of purity themselves have been commodified. Purity for sale, meaning twisted. I sometimes fear that by overusing these words, we've tainted them. The language is toxic in that it corrupts our ability to articulate genuine purity or health. As one observer put it, the diet industry has co-opted language, using terms like "wellness" and "clean eating" to mask the same old pressures. It's Orwellian in a sense: good words now hide suspect motives.

I felt this poisoning of meaning keenly when I was recovering from my ordeal. I sought genuine guidance for healthy eating and living without falling back into extremism. But everywhere I turned, the

language was suspect. Articles or influencers would say things like “discover your authentic self through our wellness program” or “this superfood will detox your life.” The words were seductive, but I had learned to taste the bitterness beneath the sugar. Authentic self – as if a self is a commodity you can buy from them. Detox your life – life isn’t a juice you strain, it’s complex and messy. I started to sympathize with those who become nihilistic or distrustful of all media. When language is so corrupted, one hesitates to believe anything. Indeed, when words can mean anything, they start to mean nothing. That line I later found in a treatise on language corruption resonated deeply with me. Our discourse has been hollowed out: “natural” can mean unnatural, “healthy” can hide unhealthy, “truth” can be a spin. It breeds a cynical paralysis. I remember flipping through channels one sleepless night and stumbling on a shopping network. A perky host was selling some kind of diet shake. Her words flowed like honey, describing how this shake was “a revolution in wellness, a truly pure blend of nutrients that will empower the best version of you.” In five seconds she managed to pack in multiple buzzwords: revolution, pure, empower, best self – all appealing concepts. But what was she really selling? A glorified protein powder. I looked at the ingredients later: it had artificial sweeteners and fillers, like countless others. Nothing revolutionary or purely natural about it. The host’s language was a costume draped over banality. And it struck me, this is the state of our Logos: a parade of dressed-up words severed from their true referents. The Word is supposed to reveal; now it obscures. The divine principle turned into a sales pitch – poison to the spirit. Even beyond advertising, I felt language growing slippery. In social and political arenas, words like “freedom”, “justice”, “truth” are bandied about until they become almost impossible to pin down. The fragmentation of media and the rise of spin means every term is contested. It’s as if a slow toxin has entered the well of communication – everyone drinks from it and ends up speaking past each other, unable to agree on basic meanings. I recall reading a powerful passage that said: “Language is no longer a tool of description; it is a tool of manipulation. It does not serve truth; it serves power”. That sentence hit me like a clarion. I copied it into my journal. It explained so much of what I felt. Food companies twist words to sell more; politicians twist words to gain influence; individuals twist words to curate their image on social media. The purity of saying what is, of naming reality plainly, is lost in a haze of strategic wordsmithing.

We see it in small ways too: how people label themselves or others. For instance, the term “clean eating” – those who adhere to it imply by language that others eat “dirty”. Or the way “healthy” has become conflated with slim, so that complimenting someone’s weight loss as “you look healthy” might actually mean “you conformed to the socially acceptable size.” Words carrying implicit judgments. Every compliment or critique encoded so it can be denied if challenged. The slow toxification of meaning is such that direct speech feels rude or radical now. Instead of saying “this snack is low-calorie and processed”, packaging says “smart-snack guilt-free goodness!” – which is so much murkier.

I found myself craving a linguistic purge, akin to how I craved purity in food. I longed for a cleansing of the Logos, a return to sincerity. But how? Unlike my personal eating habits, I cannot just fast from language – we swim in it constantly. One can attempt silence, but that’s not a solution for society at large. And I am a writer by nature; I live in words. The idea that my very medium is polluted frightened me deeply. If I describe something as “pure” or “good”, does the reader even trust what I mean? Or have those words been co-opted beyond repair?

I delved into reading about linguistic philosophy, propaganda, and semantics, searching for antidotes. I revisited Orwell’s essay on politics and language – he warned how language can corrupt thought, and vice versa, how doublethink works when language becomes vague or deceptive. It certainly felt like we were living that. I also found solace in poets and novelists who still fought to use words with precision and honesty. Literature, at its best, is a rebellion against the misuse of language – it strives to reconnect words with authentic human experience.

One phrase I encountered in a draft (interestingly, from a user file a friend shared) put it starkly: “When words can mean anything, they mean nothing”. It described how power redefines words to control perception. In a sense, that’s exactly what advertising does on a smaller scale: it redefines “pleasure”, “success”, “health” in terms of products, shaping our perception to align with what they sell. And we, the public, end up speaking that corrupted language without realizing it. How often had I parroted phrases like “guilty pleasure” or “treat yourself” or “earn your calories” without questioning them? These were borrowed mantras, implanted by a market that thrives on our oscillation between guilt and indulgence.

Realizing this, I became more vigilant in my own language use. I tried to strip away loaded terms and speak plainly. But it’s hard – the

poisoned words are pervasive. Even the notion of “purity” I so cherished is not immune. I had to ask, what does purity mean to me, given how it’s exploited in marketing “pure & natural” or oppressive social norms about “pure” women etc.? I concluded that purity, for me, meant integrity – alignment between meaning and reality, between inner and outer. A pure word is one that honestly matches the truth of what it describes. By that measure, much of our everyday vocabulary fails.

Think of corporate-speak: phrases like “family values” used in PR by companies that underpay their employees, or “sustainably sourced” by a brand that barely meets any real standards. Or political language: calling something “patriotism” to mask xenophobia, or “reform” when it’s actually regression. The logos (word) is divorced from the ergon (deed). This dissonance is toxic to trust and understanding. I felt that the more I noticed it, the more sensitive I became – like a canary in a coal mine reacting to invisible fumes. At times I envied people who didn’t notice and could just operate within the lingo of the day, seemingly unaffected. But I knew that ignorance wasn’t true bliss; it was just delayed poison.

There came a point where I had a minor breakdown – not about food this time, but about words. I was at a support group meeting (for those recovering from eating disorders, ironically) and I found myself unable to speak. Others shared their feelings, often using the common language of therapy and self-help: “triggering,” “positive vibes,” “self-care,” “body positivity.” All good concepts, yet I’d seen even these commodified (t-shirts that say SELF-CARE with a price tag, brands using body positivity to sell makeup). When my turn came to speak, I burst into tears. All I could say was, “I don’t have the right words. Everything feels fake.” The group leader took me aside after and asked me gently to explain. I tried: that even in healing spaces, the language sometimes feels prefab, like we’re checking boxes of what we’re supposed to say or feel. I worried: were my own expressions just clichés I had absorbed? Did I truly know how to articulate my experience in my own words? It’s a terrifying thought for a writer or any person: to doubt that your words are actually yours, actually meaningful.

In that moment of crisis, the group leader advised me: “Forget the right words. Just say what you feel, even if it’s messy, even if it’s not the standard terms.” She encouraged me to maybe write privately without censoring, to find my personal lexicon. It was good advice. I went home and wrote pages by hand in a notebook, without worrying about others understanding, just pouring raw emotion and

description out. It was chaotic, but within that chaos I saw glimpses of unpoisoned language – because it was true. It was not trying to sell or impress, just to communicate my soul to itself.

I realized then that the antidote to poisoned logos is honest logos. To speak truth in love, as they say – or at least in earnestness. To reconnect words with their genuine meanings, one utterance at a time. It sounds idealistic and small, but every meaningful conversation or piece of writing that isn't manipulative is like an oasis of clean water in a desert of pollution. I began to treasure those moments: a heartfelt late-night talk with a friend where no one was posturing, or a poem that used simple words to cut to the heart. One such poem I found had a line: "The word is bread, broken to feed the soul." It struck me: yes, language should be like bread – basic, nourishing. But our contemporary language is often more like candy – addictive, sweet, but ultimately unhealthy – or like poison, actively harmful. We need bread-words. Yet bread is plain, unglamorous, not what advertisers aim for. Perhaps that's why real talk, plain speech, is undervalued; it doesn't dazzle, it just sustains quietly. I promised myself to try to speak more plainly, more transparently. To resist falling into the trendy jargon unless it truly aligned with what I meant.

I became acutely aware of how I described myself and my journey. In earlier times, I might have said "I went on a clean eating kick that went too far," adopting society's phrasing. Now I try to say "I starved myself because I was hurting and angry." The latter is more brutal, but it is precise. Starvation carries the pain; "clean eating" would sanitize it. Similarly, I avoid saying "I struggle with food" vaguely – I specify, "I struggle with eating enough" or "with feeling guilt when I eat." Specificity fights the fog that euphemism creates.

It's not easy. Sometimes I slip, especially when I fear being judged. Euphemisms and buzzwords are like shields – they let you hide or conform. Dropping them can leave one feeling exposed. But I recall a concept from the user file I read: it described how corrupt language ensures we cannot even resist oppression because we lack the words to frame it. That resonated. If I couldn't even name what was wrong – whether in my personal life or in society – how could I ever change it? So reclaiming language is not just an aesthetic choice, it's a moral one, even a survival one.

Consider the word consumer. We are almost exclusively called consumers in economic discourse, not citizens or people. That subtly defines us by our role in consuming products. It normalizes the idea that our primary function is to eat, buy, use – and not to

think, create, or moralize. I started bristling at that word. I'm not a stomach on legs; I'm more than a consumer. Little shifts like that in awareness helped me push back internally against the ideology hidden in language.

Another example: when I hear "ideal body" or "beach body", I actively counter it in my head: no, they mean a thin body per current fashion; it's not truly ideal, that's a misnomer. Or when I see "guilt-free dessert", I remind myself and whoever I'm with, "Food shouldn't cause moral guilt in the first place." I've become that person who talks back to the TV commercial or corrects a friend gently, "You don't have to call it a cheat meal, you're just having food." Perhaps it annoys some, but it's my small way to detoxify the language environment around me.

What of the word *logos* itself – the grand notion of a cosmic Word, rational and divine? I wrestled with that. If words are so misused, can I still believe in some higher *Logos*? In my search, I stumbled on writings of theologians who noted that Christ as *Logos* was meant to restore connection – between God and humanity, between truth and expression. It's profound: the Incarnation as the Word made flesh is like meaning becoming tangible and honest. In a way, it's the opposite of advertisement: it's truth taking on material form, rather than lies wrapping around material goods. This gave me a peculiar comfort. Perhaps the sacredness of language can be revived by aligning with what is deeply true and human.

I even mused that my earlier near-martyrdom through hunger was a kind of wordless cry because I lacked language to express my angst. Now, having survived, it falls on me to find the words – to articulate the malaise instead of enacting it destructively. That's partly why I write these chapters. Each sentence I craft, I try to make sure it says what I mean, without undue varnish. Of course, I still use metaphor and literary flourish (I am writing literature after all), but I strive for those to clarify experience, not mask it.

A powerful insight came when I read a line: "Language was once a bridge between thought and reality... now it is a battlefield". Indeed, we see battles of narratives everywhere. But I choose to see language as a bridge again. A bridge must be built on honesty and common understanding. So I lay down brick by brick of words hoping to connect rather than divide, to reveal rather than conceal. Sometimes I imagine gathering all the people who have been hurt or estranged by the misuse of words – those misled by false advertising, those body-shamed by moralizing food terms, those gaslit by propaganda – and offering them a new lexicon, one that

heals. What would it contain? Probably simple words: enough, together, nourish, care, truth. And phrases that were clear: “your worth is not your weight,” “food is food, not moral,” “buy if you need, not to fill emptiness,” “love is presence, not product.” It sounds a bit like slogans itself, but my point is I yearn for a collective relearning of language closer to reality. A detox not of bodies but of discourse. I’ve started with myself and my immediate circle. I have conversations where I explicitly call out when something said feels off. With my friend who once said “I feel so bad, I ate bad food today,” I gently unpacked that with her – the food wasn’t “bad”; maybe it was not nutrient-dense, but calling it bad made her feel like

Part III - Crossroads with the Flesh

Mirror Appetites – Consumption, Lust, and the Metabolic Economics of Desire. Feminine – Pornography, Fear of Woman, and the Meal that Eats Back.

I am staring at my own reflection in the midnight window, a plate of unfinished food in front of me, and all I see is a hungry ghost. The meal is half-eaten, yet I feel no nourishment – only guilt. My appetite for food and my appetite for touch have become mirrors of each other: twin hungers that terrify me. **Gluttony is to food what lust is to sex**, I once read – both distort a natural appetite until appetite becomes an end in itself. In my life, this truth has grown visceral. **Every bite, every stolen glance at an erotic image, feels like feeding a monster inside me**. Each indulgence only inflames more desire, never satisfaction. I consume, and consume, hoping to fill an emptiness, but **the hunger only redoubles, distorted and magnified beyond reason**.

It wasn't always like this. In youth I craved simple things: a warm meal with family, an honest embrace. But **somewhere along the line, intimacy became entangled with consumption**, love confused with lust, nourishment with excess. I learned to **equate intimacy with consumption**, and it has left me "*spiritually and emotionally hollow*," just as it has for so many others of my generation. I feel that hollowness deep in my bones. A life saturated with stimulation but devoid of genuine connection has made me anxious, depressed, and alone – a living ghost amid feasts of excess. **My life-drive is enslaved to empty rituals of craving**, each cycle of indulgence leaving a *spiritual hangover* in its wake. By day I am tormented by lustful fantasies; by night I kneel before the bluish altar of my computer screen in a perverse liturgy of one.

Pornography has become my nightly ritual of spiritual rot. In the dark hush of my room, I become both **worshiper and sacrifice at the glowing altar of the screen**. I offer up clicks and keystrokes like prayers to an uncaring god of pleasure; each brief climax is an "*amen*" murmured in the temple of solitude. And yet, the moment it's over, I feel a great weight of emptiness settle on me. The black screen goes blank and **in the dark mirror I catch the outline of my face – hollow-eyed, ashamed, utterly alone**. The French have a phrase, *la petite mort*, "the little death," to describe the feeling after orgasm. How fitting, because each time I **give in to lust I feel something in me die** a little. As one analysis described, "*each orgasm a small death of meaning*". In these moments, pleasure and annihilation become indistinguishable: **the meal I've made of erotic images seems to be eating me back from the inside**.

I don't think I'm unique in this. Ours is a hyper-sexualized culture that sells desire like candy, yet leaves us starving for love. We are surrounded by erotic images, encouraged to devour them, to treat sex as just another transaction. **Pornography and hookup culture teach that sex is a commodity, a thrill, not a bond – bodies become objects to be used**. I certainly absorbed that lesson. I gorged myself on pixelated bodies as if gorging could cure loneliness. Instead, it **dulled my soul and disconnected desire from any shred of love or community**. What should have been tender and life-giving turned into a cold exchange: *my money or time for a hit of pleasure*. Lust became **a marketplace of despair**,

where each click was like paying a little piece of my spirit for a product that left me emptier. It is a cruel **metabolic economy of desire** – an endless cycle of input and output with no growth, only waste. **The more I indulged, the more extreme stimuli I needed for the same thrill, and the deeper the subsequent despair** . Supply rises to meet demand: more images, more novelty, to keep the high going, while my capacity for joy withers. In economic terms, I experienced *diminishing returns* ; in spiritual terms, I was bartering away my soul.

Memory offers clues to how I got here. I was eleven the first time I stumbled on a pornographic video – a child offered on the altar of images without understanding. Its impression was a mix of thrill and terror, a secret seed planted in my young psyche. Over years, that seed took root. **Rejections and betrayals in my real life drove me further into the “safe” arms of pornography** , where no living person could hurt me. I feared the complexities of real flesh-and-blood intimacy, so I retreated to the predictable fantasy of pixels. But what a devil’s bargain it was. The scripts of porn warped my understanding of sex and of women. In that curated theater of lust, I saw **violence masquerading as desire** and mistook it for normal. I saw women reduced to **consumable fragments** – mere body parts to gratify a need. And part of me started to believe that lie. Each time I emerged from that digital haze, I found it harder to look real women in the eye. I felt unworthy, anxious – or worse, I caught myself objectifying them automatically, as if my mind couldn’t see a person anymore, only an instrument of my gratification. This realization fills me with self-loathing. **I have become something twisted: the devourer who cannot truly taste, a hungry soul that fears the very food it seeks** .

I admit it: I am afraid of women. Perhaps that sounds absurd or pathetic – an adult man confessing a **morbid fear of the feminine** – but it’s true. Psychologists might call it *gynophobia* , but to me it feels less like a clinical phobia and more like a deep, almost spiritual aversion. Women are the *other* , the unknowable; they have the power to **stir in me a desire that overwhelms** and shames me. In my mind, **the feminine has become an archetype of both longing and terror** . I desire woman, yet I fear **she will consume me** – swallow me whole like the fairy-tale witch fattening Hansel only to

eat him, or the mythical siren luring sailors to drown. My earliest imprint of womanhood was perhaps my mother – loving yet overpowering, alternately nourishing and punishing. I learned young that **love can be tangled up with pain and fear**, a lesson later reinforced by the girls who laughed at my vulnerability, the lovers who left me. So the feminine, in my wounded psyche, became *the meal that eats back*: the beautiful allure that will devour the devourer. **I lust, but I also expect to be punished for that lust** – to be used, humiliated, or abandoned.

It doesn't help that **the pornography I consumed has often depicted woman as a devourer** – a dominatrix, a “femme fatale,” or simply an insatiable being whose purpose is to feed on male desire. In those videos, I saw my deepest fear and attraction played out: Woman as the **erotic force that seduces and then destroys**. How could I not internalize some of that? When I think of being with a woman in real life, my chest tightens with panic. I imagine opening myself up and being *eaten alive by her needs, her judgments, her body*. It is an irrational imagery, I know – one borne of trauma and too many nights alone with corrupt fantasies. Yet knowing it is irrational does not banish it. **I carry the fear in my gut** like a second hunger, one that knots and clenches whenever desire stirs.

And so I oscillate between craving and dread. I starve myself of affection because I cannot overcome the terror of being consumed. Lust, when it overtakes me, sends me running back to the dark safety of my solitary vice – back to pornography, where **images of the feminine can be controlled, paused, played, closed at will**, before they grow fangs. But that refuge is a lie, too. In truth, each time I bow to those images, I *am* devoured – by **shame, by isolation, by the slow corrosion of my own capacity to love**. Indeed, I've come to see **pornography as a kind of death-cult** for the soul, a ritual that offers pleasure but in fact worships emptiness. One commentator called it a “*death cult of empty lust*”, and I feel the accuracy of that phrase. **Each night I offered up my desires on a pixelated altar, I sacrificed a piece of my soul**. What was meant to bind us to love and life became, instead, a sacrament of **loneliness and death**. The feminine archetype I worshipped in secret turned into a demon that drained me, leaving me weaker, fragmented, haunted.

I think of it in economic terms sometimes – perhaps to distance myself from the pain. Lust as transaction, **desire as a currency in a doomed marketplace** . Supply and demand: I supply money, time, attention; I demand comfort, release, the illusion of intimacy. But the transaction is **inherently exploitative** . In paying for lust, I am *both the customer and the product* . The billion-dollar pornography industry is happy to take my coin, to feed me endless “content” tailored to my cravings. It calculates my desires with algorithms and offers **precisely calibrated stimuli** – a grotesque marketplace of flesh where **each click is recorded, each hunger monetized** . I know this, yet I partake; I scroll and click, even aware that I’m being used. It’s as if my **despair itself has economic value** – a commodity to be mined. In the *metabolic economics* of this despair, my **very life-force is being metabolized into profit** , and in exchange I get fleeting dopamine and lasting shame. The **“pleasure” leaves me not nourished, but spiritually emaciated** . Truly, it is **a meal that gives no sustenance** – a feast that **devours its host** .

Sitting here now, pushing around cold food on my plate, I feel the weight of all these realizations. My appetite for food is gone; in its place is a nausea of the soul. I see how **intertwined these mirror appetites have been** : whenever I tried to fill one void (hunger for affection) I filled another (stomach) instead, or vice versa. Neither excess ever healed me. In fact, often after a session of pornography, I would find myself ravenously eating junk food in a daze, as if one form of consumption triggered another – body and soul both trying to plug the same ache. Then disgust would follow: with my body, with my weakness. I would look at myself – bloated stomach, soiled tissues, bloodshot eyes – and despise this person in the mirror. **Desire leaves me feeling dirty and used** , whether it’s gluttony or lust. I struggle to remember what it was like to feel *innocent* desire, if I ever did. Now everything is corrupting or unclean to me: food, sex, even touch. When someone tries to hug me kindly, I flinch; when I taste something delicious, I chastise myself for greed. **Pleasure itself has become suspect** , as if every sweet taste hides poison.

Thus my inner conflict rages: **I yearn to be touched, yet I’m**

terrified of touch ; I crave love, yet I'm convinced that love will destroy me. In this hellish dialectic, I have slowly been shutting down. Some days I fantasize about *cutting desire out of me entirely* , as one might cut out a tumor. If I could be free of lust and hunger, perhaps I would finally know peace. Perhaps I could look at a woman without fear, if I didn't secretly want her. Perhaps I could eat without guilt, if I only ate to live and not for comfort. These thoughts are what lead me to the path I will try next – a dark and narrow path of denial. I have reached a breaking point. I refuse to continue being prisoner to these mirror appetites that reflect only my own despair. **If lust and gluttony are killing me by inches, then I will starve them out** . I will *reclaim control* – by force, if necessary, **even if it means waging war against my own flesh** .

(The narrative continues in the next chapter, as the narrator turns to fasting and flagellation in a desperate bid for deliverance.)

Fasting & Flagellation – Bodily Negation as Ritual Protest Against Erotic Chaos.

The morning light finds me on my knees on the cold wooden floor. My stomach is empty, knotted in hunger, but I welcome the pain. It is day four of my fast. **This is my ritual protest against the chaos of my desires** – a rebellion not against some external tyrant, but against the tyranny of my own flesh. Each pang of hunger is a reminder: *I am in control, not my appetite* . **Fasting, in my mind, has become a sacred act, a fire to purify the rot that lust left in me** . If my **appetites have been ruling me, then I will starve them into submission** , even if I must suffer. Especially if I must suffer.

I rise unsteadily to my feet, lightheaded. The world around me shimmers at the edges; even the morning air smells sharper. There's a strange clarity that comes when you haven't eaten – as if the body, in its desperation, heightens all the senses. I feel every ache and tremor. I run a finger along my rib, and I can count the bones more clearly now. *Good* , I think. **Let the flesh wither; let this mortal body feel the absence** . It is my offering, my plea for order and peace. In the past, I filled myself to numb the ache of

loneliness – filling my belly, flooding my senses with stimulation. Now I do the opposite: **I empty myself in hopes the ache will speak, reveal its truth** . This emptiness is deliberate. It is **a howl of protest against the part of me that betrayed me** – the lust that led me like a slave.

At times I wonder if I've gone mad. Who in their right mind would take **starvation as medicine, pain as prayer** ? But I am not the first. I take uneasy comfort recalling that throughout history, others have waged this war on the flesh for the sake of the spirit.

Mortification of the flesh is the old term. It means to *dead*en the sinful nature, to kill that which corrupts within. In the Christian tradition, it's an act of repentance – a way to share in the sufferings of Christ and tame one's passions. **Fasting and abstinence are common forms of this mortification even today** . The desert fathers and medieval ascetics all believed in it. They viewed **hunger as both a virtue and a tool** – better to be hungry than full, for *"they thought hunger and thirst could bring all the bodily passions into submission,"* as one account describes. I cling to that logic now. **Hunger as a tool** – a way to *burn out* the lust that simmers in me. Each time my stomach growls, I whisper a prayer: *Cleanse me. Make me pure* . The lightness in my body gives an illusion of lightness in my soul, as if I might just float away from the muck of desire.

Still, hunger alone did not feel like enough. The chaos inside me is not so easily quelled. Lust doesn't simply vanish because I refuse dinner. It skulks in the corners of my mind, waiting. At night I still fight the urge to seek out those old "remedies" – the porn, the fantasies. On the second night of my fast, I awoke in a sweat, heart pounding, having dreamed of a faceless woman tempting me with a lavish feast and her naked body. I nearly threw myself out of bed to escape the dream. In that moment of panic and temptation, I needed to *do* something more, something physical to assert control. That's when I remembered the ancient practices – something even more extreme than fasting: **self-flagellation** .

I'd heard of it in obscure tales of saints and zealots. Once, as a teenager flipping through history books, I read about monks who

whipped themselves to drive away impure thoughts. I recall a story of **St. Francis of Assisi** , who, when seized by a great temptation of the flesh, *“began to scourge himself severely with a cord, then cast himself naked into the snow”* to quench the lust. And another of **St. Benedict** , who threw himself into a thorn bush to escape the throes of desire. At the time I found these stories horrifying, even absurd – why would holy men mutilate themselves so? Now, in the dead of night, shivering and desperate, I understood. They did it **to survive their own passions** . **“Many saints practiced it,”** I recall reading, and that it was once *common in monasteries* . To them, this was not madness but a path to holiness.

So I improvise my own path. In the corner of my room, I find an old leather belt. My hands tremble as I fold it in half, form a loop. My mind is strangely calm, as if some iron resolution has taken over. This is **a private ritual** – a dark liturgy only I and God (if He watches) will ever know. I strip off my shirt and kneel. The first strike of the belt across my back is clumsy and weak; I hiss at the sting, more startled than hurt. But I do not stop. I **swing again, harder** , and a line of fire opens across my shoulder blades. There is pain, yes – a bright, clear pain that cuts through the mental fog. I strike again. And again. With each lash, I imagine I am **driving out the demons of lust** that cling to my skin. Tears burn in my eyes – from pain or from the fierce emotional release that comes with it. **This pain is purifying** . I *need* it to be purifying.

Soon my back is a crosshatch of red welts. I am panting, half-sobbing. I collapse forward, forehead to the floor, the belt still clenched in my fist. The room is silent except for my gasping breaths and the rushing blood in my ears. In that silence, something strange happens: I feel a moment of **peace** . My mind, for once, is not racing with lust or shame or fear. The pain has driven them out, at least temporarily. All I feel is the throb of my wounds. And beneath that, a kind of grim satisfaction. *There, I think, I have paid penance. I have shown my body who is master.*

I recall a modern writer's defense of this practice: he argued that **flagellation isn't about harming oneself, but about freely embracing pain to gain control over one's passions** . *“Using a*

rope with knots to whip one's back...the worst injury is small welts," he claimed, *"the point is to cause pain...to gain control of one's passions and to suffer willingly with Christ"*. I have given myself welts, yes – and perhaps I have gained a morsel of control tonight. **In causing myself pain, I have robbed lust of its dominion, if only for a time**. There is an almost **ritualistic order** to this: sin, then penance. Craving, then punishment, then a hollowed-out peace. It reminds me of **classical conditioning** – like training a dog. The writer even likened it to negative reinforcement: a way to *dissuade oneself from sin by associating it with pain*. In the heat of my self-scourging, I was trying to condition myself like an animal: *Touch the forbidden desire, and the whip cracks*.

In the aftermath, as I gingerly clean my stripes with a damp cloth, I wonder: **Is this holiness – or madness?** The question haunts me. By daylight, I almost recoil at what I've done to myself. Angry red marks etch my skin, evidence of a battle waged in secret. I can hide them under clothing easily enough; I will go to work, exchange hollow pleasantries, and no one will know that under my crisp shirt my back is a war zone. In the mirror, I catch sight of one raw stripe crossing an old faded scar (from childhood, a biking accident). The juxtaposition is jarring. **These new wounds, I inflicted on purpose**. The thought unsettles me. Part of me is quietly proud – I took action, I fought back against my weakness. But another part of me is deeply uneasy. Most people would say this is self-harm, not healing. *I* would have said that, before. What would a therapist think, if I dared tell one? That I'm deteriorating, perhaps. Transferring my inner pain to outer pain. It's true that the lash marks distract from the ache in my heart. When my back burns, I don't feel the loneliness as acutely. **Is that all this is? Another coping mechanism, just like the porn or the overeating, only inverted?** Instead of indulging pleasure to escape pain, I'm indulging pain to escape desire. The irony is thick and not at all lost on me.

I stand at a confusing intersection of punishment and transcendence. On one hand, these acts *do* feel like a kind of devotion. **When I fast until I'm light-headed or whip myself raw, I feel closer to something holy**, or at least *other* than the miserable cycle I was in. There's a **solemn dignity** in intentional sacrifice – I fancy that I'm imitating saints and martyrs, even if I'm a

far cry from their faith. I recall the scripture: “*I chastise my body and bring it under subjection,*” and “*if your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out.*” Such verses echo in my mind, justifying my harsh measures. Even Proverbs whispers to me: “**Blows that wound cleanse away evil; strokes make clean the innermost parts**” . *Cleanse the innermost parts* – yes, that is what I seek! And in the heat of penance, I do feel *something* cleansed, or at least quieted. It is almost **ecstatic** , in a dark way, how pain and hunger can bring a flush of clarity and even euphoria. I think of medieval flagellant processions: entire communities beating themselves, singing hymns in the streets during the Black Death, believing their blood and pain could persuade God to spare them. Did they, in those frenzied rituals, feel a grim ecstasy too – a oneness in purpose? **Pain has a way of focusing the spirit** . There have been moments in my fasting, especially, where amid the dizziness I felt an unexpected *light* : a sense of drifting outside my body, of being *more* than flesh. Is that transcendence or simply the beginning of unconsciousness? I am not sure. But those moments entice me to continue. I have not yet conquered my flesh, but I have won a few small skirmishes.

On the other hand, **I worry that I am simply destroying myself** . That this is *not* a journey toward God or goodness, but a slow slide into self-annihilation under the guise of piety. **There is a fine line between saintliness and self-destruction** , and I teeter on it, blindfolded. My **flagellation is hidden** – I tell no one, as the old teaching instructs (“when you fast, wash your face, do not look dismal” – do it in secret). I hide it not only to avoid looking pious, but because I know how disturbed anyone would be to find out. I hardly recognize myself: the same me who once sought solace in gentle comforts is now embracing suffering as salvation. I recall reading about certain saints who were secretly proud of their mortifications, considering themselves holier than others; I recoil at that thought. Am I secretly hoping someone will notice my self-imposed torment and *rescue me* ? Or admire me? I don’t think so – the idea of anyone seeing my scars fills me with shame. Yet, **there is a lonely voice inside me that longs to be seen, even in this wretched state** . Each bruise and scar, each sunken cheek from fasting, might subconsciously be *a cry to be seen and understood* . I chastise my body in private, but inwardly I’m screaming for help, hoping perhaps an all-seeing God hears it.

What is undeniable is that **my body has become a battlefield** . My **flesh, once a source of simple pleasures, I now regard as an enemy to be tamed** or punished. I feel betrayed by my own biology – these hormones and hungers that have led me to ruin. So I wage war on my flesh as if it were not *me* . I think of the Apostle's words about the **spirit versus the flesh** and how those who belong to Christ "have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." In a very literal sense, I am trying to crucify my own passions. But in doing so, am I crucifying myself? **The blows I deliver to my back, the meals I forgo – they wound and weaken me** . I grow lighter, yes, but also weaker by the day. Sometimes I catch myself in the mirror and I'm startled by the gaunt, haunted figure glaring back. My cheeks are hollowing, my eyes fever-bright, my skin draped loose over protruding bones. **I look like a penitent, or perhaps like someone terminally ill** . It frightens me. Part of me whispers: *This is too far; you are killing yourself by inches*. Another part hisses back: *Better to die pure than live in filthy desire*. These extremes duel within me endlessly.

I wish I could say all this self-denial has eradicated my lust, but **the truth is more complicated** . There are days when I feel a pristine calm, wherein the temptations truly abate – perhaps because my body has no energy to feel anything but hunger and soreness. In those moments I think, *this could be holiness* – a quiet mind, unburdened by craving. But the calm is precarious. At the slightest provocation, the embers of desire flare up, sometimes in startling ways. A whiff of perfume on a passing stranger will send my heart racing. A food commercial can suddenly make my mouth water and, bizarrely, arouse me; it's as if my deprived body seizes any sensation and conflates it with erotic longing. **My disciplined facade cracks, and I realize the beast is not dead, only caged** . Then the old shame returns double-fold: I starved you, I beat you, and still you want? Still you want. In those moments I feel despair nibbling at me. Perhaps I am beyond saving. Perhaps no amount of self-punishment will cure this "*wounded nature*" of mine – what theology calls *concupiscence* , the built-in inclination to sin. It's like I'm trying to perform an exorcism on myself, but the demon won't leave.

Nights are the hardest. The loneliness, the darkness – it all creeps

back in. I lie on my thin mattress, my body aching on the hard floor I now sleep on (I gave up the comfort of my bed, another little penance), and I whisper desperate prayers into the void. **God feels very far away in these midnight hours** . Sometimes I question if this is even for God, or solely for me – for my own sense of control. I want to believe it's for something higher, that my suffering is not in vain. But I just don't know. **I swing between thinking I'm a devout penitent and fearing I'm a deranged masochist** . Holiness, madness – they can look alike from the outside, I suspect. Perhaps from the inside too. I think of the flagellant monks – were they considered holy or insane by their peers? History frames them as fanatics, at times. Yet some were canonized as saints. The line blurs.

And what of the final hunger in me? After all the fasting, all the flogging, there is a hunger that remains – deeper than the hunger for food, more persistent than the craving for sex. It is a hunger for *meaning* , for *wholeness* , for something I cannot even name. I fear that I might be feeding this deepest hunger nothing but pain and emptiness, and that it too might begin to devour me. **I have made a feast of my own flesh in hopes of appeasing my soul, but what if the soul demands a different sustenance?** I do not have the answer. I only know that for now, **I continue this uneasy vigil** . Fasting and flagellation: my weapons, my prayers. They are the only language of devotion or protest I can speak at the moment. If nothing else, each self-denial and each lash is a way of screaming into the abyss that *I refuse to be destroyed by lust without a fight* .

As I write this (my hand trembling from weakness), the candle by my desk flickers. Dawn is still an hour away. My back aches where the scabs stretch; my stomach twists in on itself. **In this frailty, a thought comes to me unbidden: Is this suffering drawing me closer to God , or merely turning me into a ghost?** I have no conclusion. I will likely continue until either the lust or I am eradicated – whichever comes first. **At times I feel on the verge of some revelation** , at others, on the brink of collapse. Perhaps they are one and the same. I will finish this chapter of my life with a question mark. **Is this path I walk one of sanctification or self-destruction? Holiness or madness?** I cannot tell. All I know is that the hunger – for love, for peace, for *true* purity – still remains, a

final hunger gnawing at the core of me.

And so I carry on into the ambiguity of another day, uncertain whether I am climbing toward heaven or falling deeper into darkness. In the end, perhaps, they feel the same.

Part IV: Death-Cult Metabolics

Metabolic Nihilism – When calories become condemnations and digestion a moral trial

*A solitary figure stands on the scale each morning, wincing as if awaiting a harsh verdict. Every meal has become a courtroom. I step into the kitchen as a penitent enters a confessional, stomach knotted with dread. In the gospel of modern wellness, **calories are counted like sins**, and I tally them with the zeal of an anxious acolyte. A bowl of rice or a piece of bread is no longer simple sustenance—it is **moral test**, an occasion for either shame or self-righteous restraint. I chew and swallow under the heavy gaze of an invisible judge, feeling **condemnation** with each indulgence and hollow virtue with each abstinence. Nourishment has been dethroned by guilt; eating is **penance or pride**, but never peace.*

I was not always this way. Once, as a child, I ate carefree—cookies stolen from a jar, holiday feasts with family—each bite just a bite, nothing more. But now the language of **guilt and purity** infects my plate, evangelical in its intensity. In the popular “clean eating” creed, food is framed in a stark dichotomy of *good* vs. *bad*; we must “cleanse” and **repent** for any dietary misdeeds. I hear it

everywhere: *sugar is toxic* , *gluten is sinful* , *processed foods are “dirty”* . Even a leading diet program labels treats as “*syns*” (a not-so-subtle homophone for *sins*), urging followers to atone on the treadmill for the crime of dessert. It sounds absurd, yet I feel it under my skin—the ingrained belief that my worth is measured in grams of fat and days of perfect meal plans. Health has become a **new religion** , complete with its own commandments and clergy of lifestyle influencers. They sell us “guilt-free” snacks as if absolution can be purchased, and we kneel at the altar of the bathroom scale, praying for salvation in pounds lost.

My digestion, once an unconscious bodily process, is now a **moral trial** I endure daily. If my stomach burns or bloats, I interpret it as punishment for some dietary transgression. *I shouldn’t have eaten that fried chicken; now I must suffer* . The mind makes metaphors of pain: acid reflux as divine retribution, a heavy gut as **spiritual weight** dragging me down. Through this warped lens, **metabolism itself feels like penance** —the faster I burn calories, the more “virtuous” I must be. And if my body stores fat, it is not physiology but **judgment** upon my character. I confess my “food sins” to anyone who will listen: *I was bad today, I ate pizza* . There is no joy, no savoring—only the ceaseless self-flagellation of a hungry soul.

How did we get here? **Modern wellness culture** wears the trappings of faith, but offers no grace. It is, as one writer noted, a “secularized Puritanism” that treats *fat* as *sinful* and *thin* as *righteous* . Eating has been recast as a quasi-religious **quest for purity** , where “**wrong**” foods defile you and “**clean**” foods purify . The script is cruelly simple: indulge and you are weak, refrain and you are worthy. I recognize the pattern in myself and others. A friend of mine now describes bread as “*evil*.” At a pharmacy checkout, he eyes the candy rack like a literal devil tempting him. “That stuff is **poison** ,” he mutters, believing that only by purging his desire for such “unclean” food can he be free. In his words I hear an echo of a Weight Watchers maxim: “*Do not dig your own grave with your fork*.” The message is unmistakable— **to eat “wrongly” is to court death and disgrace** . No wonder each meal feels like standing at a crossroads between heaven and hell.

It would be one thing if this harsh creed actually made us healthier or happier. But like so many fervent religions, the wellness gospel **cannot truly save** . Its promises of bodily perfection are a mirage; often the devotees end up cycling through guilt and relapse. I've watched people starve and punish themselves into shedding pounds, only to regain them with interest, despair etched deeper into their hearts. The **“road to hell” in diet culture is as wide as the door of a refrigerator** stocked with forbidden treats. And hell is exactly what it feels like inside my head: an inferno of anxiety every time I sit down to eat. There is no lasting salvation here—only the **endless war** against hunger, a battle one is doomed to fight until the spirit collapses from exhaustion.

Beneath this personal torment lies a broader ideological agenda. I sense it when I flip through social media or public health campaigns: a pervasive narrative that our individual eating habits are not just personal choices, but moral imperatives tied to collective well-being. Health has been weaponized into a tool of **social control** . We're told that optimizing our diets isn't merely for *us* but to stave off societal collapse— *eat organic or the planet burns; avoid red meat or you are complicit in climate change; count your macros or you burden the healthcare system* . In subtle and not-so-subtle ways, the act of eating has been absorbed into political and cultural warfare. **Traditional cuisines and family recipes** , once sources of identity and comfort, are often disparaged as “unhealthy” or “unenlightened.” I've seen ancestral foods—rich stews, breads, festival sweets—condemned in the name of the latest scientific fad. It feels like an **assault on tradition** , a deliberate severing of food from the cultural and spiritual meanings it used to carry.

I cannot help thinking of what some critics call **“cultural Marxist” ideology** at work here: a force that seeks to strip away heritage and community bonds and replace them with a new, homogenized dogma of health and guilt. Perhaps it's fanciful, but I sometimes imagine a grand design behind all this— **an effort to destabilize and disembodify tradition** , leaving us isolated and malleable. Under this cynical project, **old communal meals and faith-based fasting** alike are swept aside, deemed archaic or oppressive. In their place rises a soulless new order of eating: nutritionally “optimized” yet spiritually empty. We get a flood of propaganda

about what's *correct* to consume, instilling a kind of **collectivized guilt**—we're guilty if we eat "wrong," guilty if we *don't* partake in the approved diet of the day. As one analysis puts it, this "*radical egalitarian vision*" produces an "**emptied-out, soulless**" culture, devoid of the comforting rites and meanings that once accompanied food. All that remains is the constant messaging that we must follow the program or face shame. Eat for the planet, eat for the cause, eat for anything except simple pleasure—every bite must carry the weight of the world.

I feel this weight constantly. It has turned the simple act of dinner into a battleground of ideologies. On one side, the wellness orthodoxy cajoles me to attain purity through green juices and glutenlessness, to find virtue in consuming only the *right* things (and of course buying the right products, for a price). On the other side, an inner voice rebels, whispering that none of this is normal or healthy—that it's a trap, a new form of tyranny over the self. Caught in between, I find no joy in eating at all. Whether I comply or defy, I feel empty. **Metabolic nihilism** is the phrase that comes to mind: a state where I derive *no inherent meaning or pleasure* from food, only layers of anxious significance imposed by others. Calories have become condemnations indeed—numbers that decide if I am good or bad today. Digestion is a trial in the courtroom of my mind, with self-esteem in the balance. Often I don't even know what I'm on trial for, except that I perpetually feel **guilty**.

In this dark mental landscape, each bite I take embodies a profound loss. Gone is the **innocence of hunger and satiation**, the way a warm meal once simply comforted me. In its place is a cold, moralistic calculus. I envy those who can eat freely, who see food as friend not foe. For me, the cup of coffee, the slice of cake, the buttery toast—they've all been transubstantiated into agents of either sin or salvation. It's a miserable creed to live by. Yet I adhere to it even as I resent it, as if fearing that to drop these rules would invite some undefined doom (be it illness, obesity, or social scorn). This is how **health becomes a religion** and a harsh one: there is no forgiveness in it, only the **perpetual threat of falling from grace**. I know logically that *food is not morality*, that a donut does not make me a devil nor a salad a saint. But such is the conditioning of our time that I *feel* the opposite in my bones.

What makes this especially cruel is that **the promised redemption never arrives** . No matter how “clean” I eat or how rigorously I punish myself at the gym, I do not attain the peace I seek. The ideal of perfect health—or perfect conformity to the wellness doctrine—always dances just beyond reach, a mirage. Meanwhile, life loses flavor, both literally and figuratively. I have exiled beloved foods for fear of their caloric “curse.” I have turned dinner invitations down because I dread the menu’s moral minefield. In moments of weakness, I binge on the very “bad” foods I forbid myself, seized by a perverse thrill and followed by crushing remorse. The cycle of **deprivation and overindulgence** spins on, tightening its grip like a hair shirt on my soul. Truly, this is nihilism: I destroy the inherent goodness of food and find *nothing* to replace it except anxiety.

Sometimes, late at night, I tiptoe to the dark kitchen and open the fridge, staring at its contents with tears in my eyes. I am hungry—not just for food, but for *escape* . I want out of this paradigm where eating is war. I want my grandmother’s kitchen back, the aroma of soup that meant comfort and love, *not* macros and guilt. I want to break bread with others without the shadow of judgment. But those desires feel as distant as a half-forgotten dream. The world that shaped me into this penitent of the pantry will not let go so easily. It keeps blaring its commandments: *Thou shalt not eat that; thou shalt hate thy flesh; thy food choices define thy moral worth*. The noise is relentless.

In the end, I often feel that **my culture has made a death-cult of consumption** , warping something natural into something neurotic. The *cult* demands absolute devotion—monitor every bite, purge every pleasure—and in return offers only the hollow promise of being “good enough” someday. It is a false promise. I sense that even if I attain the *perfect diet* , the rules will change (they always do: yesterday’s superfood is today’s toxin). There is no winning, only striving unto exhaustion. This realization sits heavy in my gut: **we have turned sustenance into suffering** , a daily crucible where the joy of living is slowly burnt away. Metabolic nihilism, indeed. Each calorie is a little curse I ingest, and I wonder how much of this I can swallow before I break.

Yet a faint question flickers in me: *Must it be this way?* Is there a path back to **meaning and mercy in eating** —to treating food as food, my body as a body, rather than as moral scorecards? I don't have the answer. For now, I remain trapped in the doctrine of diet-as-destiny, a true believer against my will. If there is a rebellion brewing in me, it is quiet and sullen. Perhaps one day I will find the courage to declare my **freedom from this faux-religion of wellness**, to eat an apple or a cake without measuring my virtue against it. But today is not that day. Today I will submit to the ritual once more: count the calories, repent the indulgences, and lie in bed feeling both empty and heavy. In this cult, even as I partake in the sacrament of a meal, I starve something deeper inside. And that, more than any "bad" food, feels like the true poison.

Doubt for Dinner – Living on misgivings about food, drink, sex, even breath

I wake up and **swallow a gulp of hesitation** for breakfast. Doubt is my daily bread. Before my feet touch the floor, questions already gnaw at me: *Is the water from the tap safe to drink, or laced with invisible toxins? What about the cereal—does it contain GMOs, too much sugar, not enough organic labels?* I open the window for fresh air but flinch— *what pollutants ride on that breeze?* Even **breathing** feels fraught. I catch myself taking shallow sips of air as if deeper breaths might invite catastrophe into my lungs. This is how I live now: **mistrusting everything that enters my body**. Food, water, medicine, intimacy... even oxygen. It's an existence tinged with paranoia, an ever-tightening circle of fear.

How did I become so afraid? It's tempting to say *the world made me this way*. There is a **cacophony of contradictory narratives** out there, and I have been exposed to them all, over and over, until my ability to trust anything shattered. Pick any ordinary substance or experience—there's a barrage of voices insisting it's killing me, and another chorus singing it's the key to salvation. **Coffee**, for instance. One article promises that coffee will extend my lifespan and fight off disease; the next warns it will give me heart palpitations or cancer. **Eggs** were vilified as cholesterol bombs, then vindicated as protein heroes, then questioned yet again. I am told red wine is a longevity elixir—no, wait, it's a toxin. The science of nutrition and

health seems to flip-flop by the week, leaving a trail of bewildered souls like me in its wake. As Vox reporters once put it, this field is “*filled with contradictory studies... each rife with flaws*,” resulting in endless confusion about what’s truly healthy. Is it any wonder I’ve developed a siege mentality toward my own dinner plate?

I scroll through the news and find no solace. If anything, **information overload** has poisoned my peace of mind. Studies, headlines, expert opinions—they pour in daily, **each negating the last**. I have learned to question every bite of food (there’s always a new harmful additive to fear), every sip of water (some new report about microplastics or lead), and even the very **air** (a new study shows pollution particles lodge in our brains, another suggests a virus rides on aerosols). The result is a kind of existential indigestion: my **mind cannot digest all these contradictions**, so it churns them into worry. I find myself caught in a loop of *What if?* What if the bread I ate contains traces of pesticide that will accumulate and give me Parkinson’s in 30 years? What if the pain in my head after drinking tap water isn’t a tension headache but *something in the water*? This might sound irrational, but then I think of the scandals and recalls—carcinogens in baby food, toxins in plastics, medicines that cure one thing but wreck another. **Trust has been systematically eroded**, and in that void of trust, doubt festers like mold.

It’s not only food and drink. I **mistrust medicine** too, sometimes absurdly. If a doctor prescribes me a pill, I interrogate it: *Do I really need this, or am I being made a pawn of Big Pharma?* I read the side effects until I’m too afraid to take it. During the recent global health crises, I watched the world split into camps—some saying “Trust the science and comply,” others spinning conspiracies of microchips in vaccines. I hovered in a no-man’s land of skepticism, unable to fully believe **either** side. Authority itself has become suspect. One half of society cries wolf about the other, and vice versa, until **every piece of advice feels like a ploy**. Wear a mask, don’t wear a mask; take the vaccine, fear the vaccine; eat this, no eat that. The oscillation left me dizzy and cynical. I now approach any consensus with caution, waiting for it to crumble under the next revelation of error or corruption.

Even **sex and love** , those most intimate of human experiences, have not been spared from my all-consuming doubt. The culture taught me to view sex through the prism of commodity and performance— **pornography turned desire into something mechanical, transactional** . I learned early that people could be used and discarded like products, that bodies were objects for pleasure not persons to cherish. For a while I embraced that lesson, chasing encounters and high-inducing images. But it left me hollow and distrustful. Now, when someone touches me tenderly, a part of me recoils, questioning their motive or doubting my own capacity to feel. **Contradictory narratives** swarm here too: On one side, a hypersexual media urging me to indulge every urge without thought; on the other, stern voices warning that sex is dangerous, fraught with power dynamics and trauma. The result? I can no longer enjoy or believe in the innocence of a kiss. I second-guess the genuineness of affection, or fear what hidden agenda might lie behind it. **My body no longer feels like a safe place to be** . It's as if every doorway into physical or emotional nourishment has a warning sign now.

This gnawing mistrust extends even to my own **instincts and needs** . Hunger—am I truly hungry, or just addicted to the engineered bliss point of junk food? Fatigue—do I need rest, or am I just being weak? Sexual desire— is it authentic, or implanted in me by years of exposure to lewd imagery and cultural conditioning? I doubt myself at the most basic level: I don't trust my taste buds (they might lead me to unhealthy choices), I don't trust my cravings (probably toxins or sugar addiction), I don't trust my attractions (maybe I just crave validation, not real connection). Living like this is exhausting. It's like performing 24/7 security checks on every input and output of my existence.

I sometimes feel I've internalized the whole **chaos of the modern world** . We live in an era of **cultural collapse and ideological extremism** , where both the far left and far right scream their version of absolute truth into our ears. Each insists the other's view will destroy humanity. *Capitalist* ideology tells me to buy and consume without limit, yet also slyly shames the consequences (obesity, climate change—somehow these become individual moral failings). *Marxist* or collectivist rhetoric, on the other hand, tells me

my very biology might be a social construct, that I must doubt my own identity if it doesn't align with the agenda, and that any traditional source of meaning (family, faith, even biological sex) is suspect or oppressive. Between these extremes, **I feel my sanity splitting** . I watch pundits and influencers hurl arguments about diets, about gender, about vaccines, about you-name-it, and everything seems weaponized. **Nothing is neutral or simple** anymore—not eating, not love, not even the air we breathe. Each realm is politicized, moralized, radicalized.

The effect on me has been a kind of **psychic collapse** . I have lost that basic trust that lets a person move through the day without constant fear. I see others still managing to live obliviously—eating a hot dog at a street stall with carefree relish, or taking a deep breath on a sunny day just *because* it's sunny. I envy them like a prisoner envies the free. For me, the world is a minefield. Every meal could hide a landmine; every pleasure could carry a price. The body, which should be my natural home, feels like a **battleground** where invisible forces clash: chemicals, ideologies, expectations. I lie in bed at night and replay the day's decisions with trepidation. Did I drink from a plastic bottle—will the microplastics now lodge in my organs? Did I use the microwave—did I absorb radiation? Did I show enough skepticism toward that news article—or have I been brainwashed a little further? My own mind is not exempt from doubt. On particularly bad days, I even question reality: *Am I seeing things as they are, or only through the distortions of propaganda and paranoia?*

This condition, living on **misgivings** , is as draining as it sounds. Doubt does not nourish; it nibbles. It eats away at any sense of solidity. I realize that **constant skepticism is its own kind of toxin** . It has poisoned my ability to enjoy anything. A glass of cold water on a hot day could be pure bliss, but I sip it wondering if the filtration missed some contaminant. A home-cooked meal with friends could be joy and camaraderie, but I poke at it, hearing one friend's comment about carbs and another's about pesticides echo in my head, until the food tastes like ash. The **contradictory narratives** that bombard us have over-sensitized me to everything. I can't tune out the noise. It's like having a dozen talk radio stations blaring in my head, each with a different warning: *Too many calories! Too*

many chemicals! or Don't trust the government! Don't trust the doubters!

I acknowledge that some of this is irrational. I yearn to turn it off—to trust *something* again. What I truly crave is a sense of **safety**. A simple confidence that the food I eat will sustain me, that the medicine I take will heal me, that the people I love will hold me, that the air I breathe is good and the ground under my feet solid. But our epoch has robbed me of those comforts. The more I learned of the world's workings, the less safe it all became. Perhaps ignorance was bliss—I sometimes wish I could rewind to childhood ignorance, when a tap water was just water, not a chemical cocktail; when dinner was just yummy or yucky, not ethical or unethical; when I didn't know what “**microplastic**” even meant. But there's no unlearning what I've learned.

Some say this pervasive doubt is by design—that **powerful interests actually benefit** from a populace that is anxious and confused. I think of how, in my anxious state, I became a perfect consumer: I bought countless supplements, water purifiers, special diets, self-help books, all in hopes of finding certainty. *They* (whoever *they* are) sold me both the illness and the cure: first stoke the fear (in news, ads, online debates), then sell the product that claims to alleviate it. Indeed, “those in power have learned to manufacture desire and exploit fear with precision,” whispering to us that we *lack* something and then offering to fill the gap—for a price. Feeling inadequate or scared? Here's a superfood powder, a wellness app, a political tribe to join. But the satisfaction never lasts; the cup is leaky by design. I suspect my endless doubt is not merely a personal quirk but a **symptom of a society-wide strategy**: keep everyone slightly off-balance and afraid, and they will be easier to manipulate—eager to buy relief, vote for “safety,” relinquish autonomy for the promise of security. In a cynical sense, my doubt is profitable to someone.

At times I recall a line I read: “*Keep them chasing the next high, and they won't notice the walls of their prison being built around them. Keep them angry at each other, and they won't unite to challenge their real tormentors.*”. Those words haunt me because they ring

true. The more I stew in mistrust—of my food, my body, my neighbors—the more isolated and **powerless** I feel. I'm so busy doubting and debating basic realities that I have no energy left to question the larger architecture of why life is like this now. My doubt, meant to guard me, has become *my own prison* . In my hyper-vigilance, I've walled myself off from life's simple pleasures and collective comfort. I rarely eat with others; I'm too nervous about what they'll serve or what judgments will fly around. I rarely let myself *fully* love; I'm too jaded, expecting betrayal or disillusionment. The tragedy is clear: **in fearing the poisons, I've swallowed another poison** just as deadly—paralysis and loneliness.

Is there an antidote? I wish I knew. Some say the answer is to practice "*mindfulness*" or "*balance*." Trust yourself, filter out the noise, find a middle ground. That sounds lovely in theory, but how to implement it when one's very capacity for trust is corroded? My mind demands evidence, certainty—two things in short supply in a world like ours. Sometimes I entertain radical fantasies of escape: living off-grid in some pristine wilderness, hunting and gathering my own food, away from media and marketing. Perhaps there I could relearn to trust the clear water of a stream, the sunlight on my skin, the evidence of my senses. But even that fantasy doesn't comfort me long—I know enough to know that *no place is untouched* by the world's contaminants (even the Arctic has microplastics, even the deepest forest has fallout from our industries). There is **no truly safe place** , and that is the hardest truth of all that I've had to swallow.

So I remain here, in civilization, trying to cope. My diet, literally and figuratively, has become one of **misgivings** . I nibble at life warily. If I cannot wholeheartedly trust, perhaps I can at least *test* and *verify* as I go. I practice little acts of courage: drinking the tap water when I'm really thirsty (and telling myself, *if it's good enough for millions of others, it's probably fine*), or eating a meal without scouring its ingredient list first. I try to silence the extremes in my head: to tell the capitalist in me that I won't buy every solution they sell, and the alarmist in me that not every bite is a bullet. Some days I succeed a bit—the soup tastes warm and comforting for a few spoonfuls before the worries creep back; the embrace of a friend feels sweet for a

minute before I remember reasons to be guarded.

In **No Longer Human**, Osamu Dazai's narrator said, "*I have never managed to understand what it means to be human.*" I feel a kinship with that line. My version might be: *I have never managed to understand what it means to feel safe as a human.* My anxiety and mistrust make me feel, at times, less than human—like a skittish animal expecting a trap around every corner. It's a lonely way to be. And yet, paradoxically, I know I'm not alone: I see around me an entire generation afflicted with similar doubts. Many of us quietly share this **unease about everything**. It's the zeitgeist of our poisoned age.

Perhaps naming it is the first step to confronting it. *Doubt for dinner*—I can almost laugh at the phrase, dark as it is. It paints an image of a person hunched at a table, consuming emptiness with a fork and knife. That person is me. But I don't want it to be me forever. If there is any longing still alive in my heart, it is the **longing for purity**—not the false purity of diets and ideologies, but a pure, simple trust in something again. I long to take a deep breath without fear, to eat and drink with gratitude instead of suspicion, to love without a cynical tally of risks. I long for the kind of faith I vaguely recall from childhood—that *life is fundamentally okay*, that I can let my guard down and live.

It will not be easy to regain that faith. Perhaps I never will entirely. But writing this, confessing my misgivings, I feel a small flame of resolve. I have identified the thief that stole my peace—the overdose of contradictory narratives and the extremisms that have pushed me to the brink. Now I must try, step by cautious step, to reclaim my safety. To silence one radio station of fear at a time. To tell myself: *This food is just food. This breath is just breath.* **Life is meant to be lived, not interrogated.** If I say it enough, maybe I'll start to believe it. And maybe the meal of doubt I've been forcing down can eventually be replaced by something more nourishing: a taste of trust, a morsel of peace.

The Thanatophoric Kitchen – Recipes for

collapse; cookbooks of catastrophe

The kitchen of my mind has become a **Thanatophoric Kitchen** , a death-bearing hearth where each recipe I concoct seems to feed not life but collapse. I stand at the counter of this inner kitchen, surrounded by cookbooks that read like **manuals for disintegration** . The stove ticks on, but what simmers in the pots is bitter and ruinous. Here, I have collected over the years a repertoire of **metaphorical recipes** —dishes that encapsulate the spiritual decay I see all around, and within, me. In a morbid twist of creativity, I begin to write them down in a stained notebook:

Gluttony Au Gratin – A hearty casserole of excess *layered with shame* . Take rampant consumer appetite and smother it in self-loathing; bake until the spirit is heavy and hollow. Best served in isolation, with a side of regret.

Self-Help Salad – Crisp greens of *optimism* , tossed with the acidic vinegar of **despair** . Garnish liberally with motivational quotes for flavor. This dish promises rejuvenation but leaves an aftertaste of futility when consumed alone at midnight.

Childhood Stew (Sautéed in Chemicals) – A nostalgic broth of memories, into which we mix the bright vegetables of youth (school lunches, birthday cakes, grandma's cookies). Now adulterate it with a packet of artificial coloring and preservatives, until the original innocence is thoroughly obscured. The result is sweetly sickening—a taste of **lost purity** , tinged with toxins, that lingers on the tongue.

These are but a few of the “**recipes**” for collapse I’ve dreamt up. Each one is a parody and a lament. In the theater of the modern kitchen, it seems we are both chefs and spectators of a grand guignol—a horror show where nourishment is replaced by a macabre facsimile. I open a cookbook at random; its pages flutter, revealing titles like “*50 Ways to Feed Your Anxiety*” or “*The Profit-Driven Pantry*.” The ingredients lists call for things like **broken**

families, processed faith, extracted value, distilled resentment . Following one of these recipes feels like casting a spell of entropy. And indeed, the more I read, the more I am convinced that our society has been systematically compiling these **cookbooks of catastrophe** . We have, collectively, written a cuisine of self-destruction.

Look at how **capitalism** has set this table. Under its relentless innovation, even the sacred act of family dinner has been commodified and hollowed out. Children—bright, innocent children—have been turned into **brand extensions** of their parents or of corporations, little marketing targets with open mouths. I see it in so many forms: the toddler in a logo-covered onesie, the grade-schooler who can recognize corporate mascots before they can read, the teen meticulously crafting their online “personal brand” like a product on a shelf. Advertisers openly admit it: hook them young and you have consumers for life. **The food industry alone poured \$1.8 billion in a single year on advertising aimed at children** , pushing sodas, sugary cereals, and salty snacks onto impressionable minds. They know that tastes formed in youth persist, that a child who craves brand-name cookies today will likely be an adult with brand loyalties tomorrow. In my Thanatophoric Kitchen, I imagine a pot labeled “Children’s Stew” in which bright, healthy ingredients (curiosity, joy) are slowly boiled away by the caustic broth of **corporate indoctrination** . By the time the stew is done, what remains is a compliant little consumer, seasoned to perfection with brand slogans. It’s a **recipe for spiritual malnutrition** : the child’s soul, once rich with imagination, reduced to a set of cravings engineered by others.

Families themselves are not so much **diners at the table** as they are the **main course** to be devoured by the market. Every element of home life is eyed by companies as an opportunity for profit. The kitchen in a home used to be a place of bonding and tradition—now it’s a place swamped by branded packaging and competing messaging. A simple family meal must navigate a minefield of marketing: cartoon characters on the cereal box to entice the kids, diet labels on the yogurt to placate the weight-conscious parent, QR codes on the ketchup linking to some promotional website. The family’s attention is fragmented, each person targeted individually by

ads even as they sit together. **Meals turn into business transactions** : parents “outsourcing” cooking to fast-food chains because both are working late at gigs that barely pay the bills, children learning to prefer the taste of McNuggets over any home recipe. It’s not the family consuming dinner—it’s **the corporate machine consuming the family** , turning their need to eat into a steady stream of revenue. In truth, each family is profiled and studied by data analysts, their grocery bills and dining habits fed into algorithms so that marketing can ever more precisely target their weaknesses. I find this grotesque. I picture a monstrous mouth devouring a happy family portrait, spitting out only **statistics and profits** .

“ **Meals into units of profit** ” was one of the lines I scribbled in my notebook, and it’s painfully literal. Food, once the embodiment of culture and community, has largely become **a commodity in corporate hands** . The recipes we follow are not those of our grandmothers, but those concocted in corporate labs for maximum shelf-life and “bliss point” appeal. Yes, there are actual scientists calibrating the sugar-fat-salt ratio in a chip or cookie to ensure we can’t eat just one. They create an *addiction in a bag* , exploiting our biological reward circuits for profit. Meanwhile, we are admonished for lack of willpower as our waistlines grow and our health declines. It’s a cruel joke: **the food industry engineers hyper-palatable, addictive foods, and society shames the individuals who overconsume them** . Gluttony served with shame, indeed. It’s as if the right hand fattens us up while the left hand points and sneers.

I see a vision of a grotesque **banquet** : in a grand hall, the captains of the food industry sit feasting on golden profits, while behind the kitchen door, the masses gorge on the cheap, addictive fare those captains designed. Now the captains occasionally peek out and shake their heads at the diners— *tsk, such lack of discipline* , they tut, even as their hidden recipes ensure the eating continues. At this feast, **hunger itself is manufactured** and perpetuated for gain. One might say we in the developed world are both over-fed and under-nourished: stuffed with calories and *content* , yet starved of meaning and genuine health. It is a **thanatophoric feast** —a feast leading toward death, not life. For what does it profit us to gain all this processed abundance and lose our vitality, our traditions, our

autonomy?

The kitchen, which should be a place of warmth and life, has taken on the chill of a morgue in my imagination. The pots and pans are instruments of an ongoing autopsy—dissecting culture, dissecting innocence. I open the *Recipe for Cultural Marxism* (a theoretical volume perhaps), and it instructs: *Take one nuclear family; break it down into individual consumers; discard the binding agents of tradition and faith; mix in guilt and identity discord until homogenized.* The result is a **soulless gruel**, easily digestible by the powers that be. I open the *Recipe for Hyper-Capitalism*, and it reads: *In a large society, combine unequal parts of fear and desire; heat with relentless advertising; when it begins to bubble, stir in the notion that everything is a product (including human identities, relationships, and beliefs). Continue to stir until all dissolves into a single consistency of monetized goo.* That goo is then extruded into plastic packages and sold back to us as the substance of our lives.

In this **theater of death**, even our attempts at escape are co-opted. Consider the self-help industry I lampooned in my recipe list. We know something is wrong—our anxiety, our sadness, our sense of meaninglessness signal as much. So we reach for cookbooks of *self-improvement*, eager to whip up a happier life. But the **self-help concoctions** often turn out to be sprinkled with the same despair we hoped to cure. They tell us to meditate, exercise, eat clean, declutter—fine advice, until you see it morph into yet another chore, another product to buy, another standard to fail. The promise of empowerment comes packaged as a commodity, thus staying within the logic of the very system that made us sick. It's like trying to cure poison with poison—no wonder despair creeps back in, seasoning our earnest efforts with bitterness.

What truly breaks my heart is the **childhood flavor** of all this. I think of my own earliest memories in the kitchen: helping my mother stir a pot, flour on my nose, the comforting smell of a meal cooking slowly. Those moments had a sacred quality—love made tangible in soup and bread. Compare that to now: children's kitchens are often just a microwave and a stash of instant packets. Or worse, children's meals have become battlegrounds of psychological manipulation.

Kids are **bombarded with advertising** for junk food at every turn (on TV, on YouTube, in school sponsorships), designed to create lifelong habits of unhealthy eating. Their taste buds are trained to prefer Doritos over apples, sugary cereal mascots become their friends. The result: not only physical ill-health but also a severing of the lineage of home-cooked wisdom. How many young people know the recipes of their ancestors? Far fewer than know the jingle of the latest fast-food ad. It's a tragic form of **cultural erasure** : the family recipe book gathers dust while the UberEats app scrolls endlessly. In destroying the chain of knowledge passed at the dinner table, we lose more than nutrition—we lose identity and belonging. Each lost recipe is like a language going extinct, each missed family dinner a ritual undone.

I survey this wreckage from the vantage of my Thanatophoric Kitchen. The **entropy** is accelerating. The soup is boiling over; the blender has been left running and is overheating; knives lie dulled and rusting from misuse (who needs knives when everything is pre-cut, pre-packaged?). The air smells not of rosemary or baking bread, but of burnt plastic and despair. It's clear that if we continue following these recipes for collapse, the final outcome is a **kitchen that serves only hunger and ends in silence** . I envision that final scene: the last family meal is long past, the last genuine laugh around a table a distant echo. The refrigerator hums empty, stocked with artificial slabs called "food" that nobody remembers how to enjoy. People pick at their nutrient-fortified bars alone, in silence, staring at screens. The children have grown up never knowing the comfort of a homemade meal—they only know how to order and consume, order and consume. Eventually, even that loses its appeal. The population, overfed and under-souled, dwindles into listless ennui. **Total entropy** : the heat death of human connection and meaning in the very space that once symbolized care.

In that grim finality, the kitchen lights flicker and go out. Pots cool on the stove, covered in dust. The table remains set for a feast that never comes. A cookbook lies open to a page titled "*The Feast of Life*," but it's smeared and illegible—perhaps it was a last attempt at redemption that came too late. All that's left is **hunger** itself, prowling like a feral animal in the dark. Not just physical hunger, but a deeper hunger— for love, for authenticity, for all the flavors of

living that we forfeited. And **silence** . No laughter, no clink of forks, no prayers of thanks. Just the low electric buzz of an appliance left running unattended in an empty house.

This vision is melodramatic, I know. Perhaps it hasn't come to that yet, and perhaps it never will. Perhaps somewhere, in many places, people are still cooking with joy, feeding each other in more than the literal sense. I hold onto that hope, thin as a soup broth. Because I must admit, I **long for purity** and renewal in this poisoned culture of ours. I long for the day we collectively throw out these **death-cult cookbooks** and write new recipes—recipes for resilience, for community, for *life* . I imagine a different kitchen: one where children learn from elders how to knead dough, where friends gather to chop vegetables and swap stories, where each ingredient is respected (be it a carrot or a piece of beef or a spice from far away), and where **eating is a humble sacrament of togetherness** , not an act of moral fear or corporate loyalty.

To get there, we will have to confront both the **carnivorous capitalism** and the **ideological extremism** that have perverted our food culture. We will have to guard children from being preyed upon by markets, and guard our families from being atomized. We will need to recover old wisdom about food and the body, and filter out the profiteering noise. We will need to find the courage to be human again—simple, fallible, joyous in something as basic as breaking bread.

Standing in my Thanatophoric Kitchen, I close the toxic recipe book and instead reach for a blank page. The kitchen may have been a theater of death, but a theater implies we can change the play. Perhaps we can still rewrite the script of our meals. Perhaps the **final recipe** need not be collapse. The ingredients for renewal are still here somewhere—in our memories, in our taste buds, in the seeds saved by farmers, in the whispers of grandma's kitchen ghosts. Maybe we can relearn how to **feed our bodies without starving our souls** . Maybe one day this kitchen will be filled with laughter and music again, not silent despair.

For now, however, I end this chapter in a quiet minor key. The reality I've observed remains bleak: a society concocting its own collapse through how it consumes. The pot is on the boil and nearly dry. **If we continue this path, we will indeed cook ourselves into oblivion.**

The last course of this death-cult feast will be emptiness, and the dining hall will echo with nothing but the sound of our own undoing. In that silence, perhaps future generations (if any survive) will wonder how we could starve amidst such abundance, how we could turn the **kitchen—heart of the home—into a tomb**. It is a question I cannot answer. I set down my pen. The only sound now is the faint drip of a faucet in the dark.

Part V: Toward Divine Emaciation

Ascetic Escalation – Starvation as Ladder to the Absolute; impurities burnt in inner fire

I stand before the mirror in the half-light, tracing the ridges of my ribs with trembling fingers. Each rib juts like a rung on a ladder, each pound lost a step upward toward some imagined purity. In the glass, I see a gaunt pilgrim making an offering of his own flesh. With every day of emptiness, I am **ascending** – or so I tell myself in the fever of hunger. My thinning body has become both altar and sacrifice, a testament to how **starvation** became my sacrament in a poisoned world.

Hunger used to be just a bodily cry – a simple request for sustenance – but I have transfigured it into a **prayer**. In the aching hollow of my stomach, I swear I can feel a flame. This inner fire burns with purpose, consuming **impurities** I've carried my whole

life. Every ideological toxin I've ingested from society – every lie, every shame, every excess – I imagine them turning to ash inside me. The old monks spoke of *Agni*, the sacred fire that purifies by burning from within. In my private theology, **fasting** is the furnace and **purification** the promise. Each hunger pang is a little blaze that scorches away another layer of inherited corruption clinging to my soul.

I have come to believe that self-starvation is not merely protest or pathology, but a pathway to **divine** absolution. The world taught me to feel filthy for every bite: one voice (sweet and **progressive**) whispered that consuming anything – meat, sugar, comfort – was an indulgence complicit in exploitation; another voice (stern and **conservative**) thundered that gluttony is sin, that the body must be disciplined into holiness. Caught between these extremes, I internalized a single, unifying dogma: *Eating is weakness; abstinence is strength*. Now I kneel at the altar of emptiness, where left-wing austerity ideals and right-wing purity doctrines converge. In the chapel of my mind, I chant the twin mantras of our age: *Consume less, be pure. Suffer more, be holy*.

With each skipped meal, I feel a perverse **pride** blooming in the pit of my emptiness. I am shedding not just weight but worldly **attachments**. There is less of me every morning – and that feels like more of my soul can breathe. I imagine myself becoming ethereal, translucently clean, like a saint in a stained-glass window untouched by the rot of flesh. The **poisoned world** around me is obsessed with more, more, more – but I am carving a path of **less**. Less food, less desire, less of the corrupt matter that ties me down. It is an *ascetic escalation*: each act of denial a higher rung on the ladder to the Absolute. As I ascend, I fancy that I can almost glimpse the **Divine** – a stark and shapeless perfection that lies above the realm of appetite.

Of course, a quiet voice in me wonders if I am merely killing myself in slow motion. But I smother that doubt with holy rhetoric. I tell myself this is not death I'm courting, but **transcendence**. After all, the saints of old starved in the desert to hear God more clearly. Medieval mystics refused bread and called it **miraculous**. Their

bodies withered and the world hailed them as blessed, their fasting dubbed *anorexia mirabilis* – *miraculous lack of appetite* . If they could find God in emptiness, why not I? In this half-delirious state, I see myself among those **ascetics** : Catherine of Siena, who ate nothing but the Eucharist for years; the desert fathers, living on locusts and honey; even the hunger strikers who treated their bodies as battlefields for justice. I have joined their ranks in my own bedroom, a self-made monk with sunken cheeks and eyes lit by a fanatical spark.

The **impurities** I yearn to burn away are not only personal but cultural. I feel contaminated by modern life – by its gluttony and its ideologies. I carry the guilt of both the **consumer** and the **consumed** . On one hand, I have been indoctrinated to crave the toxic feast of consumer capitalism: junk food and junk values that left me spiritually obese and morally sluggish. On the other hand, I've also been force-fed the moralism of puritans who shame every pleasure: religious figures who warned that even enjoying a meal too much is a step toward damnation. My psyche is a battleground of these contradictory **dogmas** , and the only truce I see is to reject food entirely. In starvation I find a grim union of the slogans: *Starve the ego, feed the soul* and *No consumption = no corruption*.

So I tighten my belt to the last notch and consider it a halo. The dizziness that comes from an empty belly feels like the stirring of **spirits** around me. I am light-headed, yes, but also, I insist to myself, *light* -bodied – closer to light itself. The world is heavy with its meals and excess; I choose to be light enough to slip free of its gravity. Each day is a ritual of **renunciation** . The morning air tastes cleaner when I haven't tainted it with breakfast. At noon I drink water and pretend it is sacred wine purging my insides. By evening, when hunger's claws scratch deep, I meditate on **fire** : the holy fire that the Hindu sadhus speak of, rising up the spine, burning karma; or the Pentecostal fire that purifies the faithful. I tell myself I can feel that fire consuming my **toxic** longings and frailties. If I suffer, so be it – pain is the price of **purity** .

As night falls, I lie down feeling emptier than ever, and oddly, *powerful* . There is power in **refusal** , in breaking the bread and

deciding not to eat it. The world cannot poison a man who abstains from its banquets. This thought gives me comfort as my stomach groans like a bereaved animal. I place a hand over it and imagine I am calming a beast that needs to be trained. *Hush*, I whisper to my own hunger, *you are my offering; you are the fire that will carry me upwards*. In the darkness behind my eyes, I picture a ladder of bones – **my** bones – reaching toward a distant, pure star. And rung by rung, pound by pound, I climb.

Alien Flesh – Dissociation, psychosis, and the body as estranged roommate

I wake in the predawn hours to a familiar sensation: a floating, disembodied awareness. For a moment, I do not know where I am. My consciousness hovers near the ceiling, looking down at a frail figure tangled in sheets. The figure is me – and yet not me. **That body** on the bed feels like a stranger I'm obliged to care for, an estranged roommate I find myself stuck with. My first thought is not *I am hungry*, but *he* is hungry. I watch "him" – **my body** – as one watches a problematic housemate, with a mix of pity and disdain.

This dissociation has been growing day by day. As I have ascended in pursuit of purity, I've also drifted further from the physical vessel that carries me. My body feels less like *me* and more like an **it**, a thing I inhabit reluctantly. I sometimes catch myself referring to the body in the third person, as if it were an unruly animal or a faulty machine. *It's weak today*, I think when the limbs tremble climbing the stairs. *It craves what it should not*, I reprimand when the stomach growls. I have become a stern landlord to the flesh I live in, and my flesh in turn has become a sullen tenant, skulking in the halls of my being.

There is a creeping **psychosis** in this estrangement. I know it, yet I cannot stop it. My reflections in the mirror have become conversations with an **other**. At times I glare at my gaunt face and

imagine it glares back, resentful. I speak to my body under my breath: *Why are you like this? Why won't you obey?* Sometimes the body seems to answer in its language of aches and nausea: *I am starving. I am dying. Why won't **you** obey **me**?* These dialogues loop in my head, blurring the line between rational thought and hallucination. I wonder if I am losing my mind – or if perhaps I've **already lost it**, piece by piece, with each lost pound and each sleepless night of hunger-induced delirium.

My **identity** is crumbling. The person I used to be – someone who laughed, ate carefree, felt at home in a simple mortal coil – that person is a ghost now. In the mirror, I see hollow eyes that don't quite belong to either the old me or the new me. I look like a marionette carved from wood and sharp angles, something that could move only if a puppeteer pulled the strings. *Is this my face?* I wonder, touching the sharp edge of my cheekbone. It doesn't feel like mine. My face, my voice, even my thoughts feel hijacked by the extremes I've embraced. **Cult-like dogmas** from all sides have colonized my psyche, until I no longer know where *their* voices end and **mine** begins.

Indeed, my body has become a **battlefield** for other people's ideas. Competing creeds have staked their flags into my flesh over the years. The **progressive** ideals told me my body is a political site: I should mold it, display it, maybe even medicalize it to align with some vision of liberation – yet also I was told to be body-positive, to love myself as I am. The contradiction made my head spin. The **conservative** doctrines told me my body is a temple of God, sacred but easily defiled: every tattoo, every craving, every sexual urge a graffiti on God's artwork. So I oscillated between indulgence and guilt, activism and abstinence, never at peace. Each ideology tried to claim my physical being: one demanded I use my body as a billboard for righteous causes, another demanded I whip my body into moral shape like a penitential monk. In the crossfire of these commands, my own **voice** was drowned out. My body ceased to be *my home* and became a site of war – and now, a wasteland in the aftermath of too many battles.

There are moments – terrifying moments – when I don't recognize

myself **at all** . Not just in the mirror, but in my inward reflection. I hear myself think thoughts that seem alien. I catch a glimpse of my reflection in a shop window and feel a spike of horror, as if I've seen a walking corpse. Once, I stumbled in the kitchen from dizziness, and as I lay on the cold floor tiles, it felt like an **out-of-body** experience – I hovered above, watching a crumpled figure clutching his ribs in pain. I felt no sympathy; only a clinical fascination, as though observing a stranger's calamity. When I "returned" to my body, it was with reluctance, like re-entering a broken shell.

This estrangement breeds a peculiar kind of **loneliness** . After all, if I am no longer at home in myself, where can I ever feel at home? I am exiled even from my own flesh. Each time my body tries to communicate – a trembling in the hands, a fluttering heartbeat, a hunger pang, a sob – I respond with impatience or disgust. I've become a tyrant to myself, and in turn my body has become a rebel in quiet revolt. The **trauma** of this constant civil war inside me has driven me to the brink of madness. At night I hear whispering echoes in my head, and I'm not sure if it's my own thoughts or the body's pleas, or some phantom voice implanted by all the authorities I let rule me. I sometimes wonder if I've conjured actual spirits or demons in my delirium – the ghost of every **cultish creed** that ever seduced me, now haunting my starved mind.

They say prolonged fasting can induce visions. Saints saw angels when they deprived the flesh. But in this grim parody of sanctity, I see only **hallucinations** of horror. Shadows at the edge of my vision, insects crawling on my skin that vanish when I focus, voices that chide me for eating even a crumb. I have dreams where I'm gorging on a lavish feast, only to wake up panicked and guilty, heart racing as if I truly sinned. I've dreamt of my own body devouring **me** – a cannibalistic nightmare of self-consumption that left me screaming silently into my pillow. These are the wages of trying to divorce oneself from one's own meat and bone. The mind, deprived of nourishment and companionship, turns on itself, preying on its host.

In my more lucid moments, I see the **tragedy** of it. I was trying so desperately to be pure, to be ideologically and spiritually correct,

that I have **annihilated** the simple solace of being a human in a human body. My body should have been my ally – carrying me through life – but I treated it as an enemy to conquer or a sinner to punish. Now it hardly feels alive, and neither do I. The **estrangement** is nearly complete: body and soul separated by a widening gulf of mutual distrust. I live in this house of skin like an unwanted guest, and the house itself decays from neglect and hostility.

Yet, some sliver of awareness remains, watching this unfold with horror and a perverse curiosity. *Is this what I wanted?* I ask myself in a rare moment of self-honesty. I wanted to be pure spirit, untouched by mortal coarseness. I wanted to **transcend** the crude matter of my flesh. Well, here I am – on the threshold of that wish. I am nearly a ghost. My arms are thin as twigs; my face is drawn and cadaverous; my mind floats unmoored from reality half the time. If **No Longer Human** was a state of being, I have reached it. I have become the very embodiment of disconnection: a man severed from the world, from others, and from himself. I thought I was climbing to heaven, but maybe I have only succeeded in making a hell inside my own skin. In this fractured state, I ask silently for some sign – anything – that there is *meaning* in this self-imposed exile from my own flesh. But only silence answers, and the silence itself feels like an old, taciturn roommate that will not even acknowledge my presence.

Last Supper with the Void – Choosing absence over abundance; keeping the cycle intact

The table is set for a feast of nothingness. I sit down as dusk settles, a solitary figure before an empty plate and an unused silver fork and knife. This is my **Last Supper** with the Void. There is no bread, no wine – only the profound absence that I have invited as my final guest. In the quiet of my small kitchen, I perform a wordless ritual: I

bow my head as if to pray, but instead of thanking any deity for sustenance, I thank the **emptiness** for its company. The Void has been my most faithful companion of late, more constant than any friend or god. Tonight, I honor it.

Choosing **absence over abundance** has become my creed. In a world obsessed with consumption and excess, I have found a strange freedom in **refusal**. Every day, the world tempts with its cornucopia of experiences – food, entertainment, meaning, desire – and every day I have learned to say *No*. This defiance began as a coping mechanism, perhaps, but now it feels like the only truly **mine** decision I have ever made. By not taking, by not eating, by not indulging, I reclaim a shred of agency in a world that would stuff me full of its poisons. There is power in *choosing* the Void. It is a final vestige of control when all else is dictated by society's insatiable script of *more, more, more*.

I pick up the fork and knife and hold them in a mockery of dining etiquette. The absurdity is not lost on me – a skeleton of a man performing a pantomime of dinner. But this is a **symbolic meal**. The last supper I partake in is one of negation. I am *fasting from meaning* as much as from food. All the stories, causes, and creeds that once fed me now feel like cloying, artificial flavors. I want none of them. I would rather starve than swallow another lie or another disappointment. So I consume **nothing**. In doing so, I make a statement: that I refuse to be sustained by a poisoned world's offerings. In the gospel of emptiness that I have written for myself, *to abstain is to be pure* – and I will uphold that even if it kills me.

As I “dine” with the Void, I reflect on the **cycle** I am keeping intact. It is a cycle of refusal and hollow sustenance that has paradoxically kept me alive this long. Each day I refuse nourishment, yet I feed on a certain dark satisfaction. That satisfaction – the grim pride in my self-denial – becomes its own sustenance. This is the twisted secret: by denying the body, I have been *feeding the ego* that prides itself on denial. It's a snake eating its own tail, a perfect circle of self-justification. The cycle goes like this: **shame** leads to starvation, starvation gives a feeling of control, control feeds a sense of righteousness, righteousness then justifies further starvation. Round

and round it goes, a serpent of **meaninglessness** devouring its tail. In choosing absence, I've created a new kind of abundance – an abundance of nothing, an endless supply of void to fill myself with. And so the cycle remains unbroken.

I lift an empty spoon to my lips and pretend to taste the air. My movements are slow, reverent, as if I were tasting the nectar of the gods. In truth, there is *nothing*. But that nothingness is exquisitely under my command. For once, **I decide** what enters my body and what does not – and I decide on nothing. The world's feast, laden with both literal and figurative toxins, will not claim me tonight. This is how I **affirm** my existence now: through negation. I negate hunger, negate desire, negate the life force within me bit by bit, and call it freedom. It is a **strange, dissociated kind of survival** indeed – surviving by rejecting the very thing that sustains life.

As the shadows lengthen, I imagine all the abundance I have left behind. There were times I dreamed of warm bread, of sweet fruit, of love and laughter around a crowded table. Those dreams still flicker somewhere in the distant recesses of my mind, but I extinguish them like candles. Abundance belonged to a life that betrayed me. The modern world offered banquets of *meaning* and *identity*, but each time I partook, I was left emptier. Every ideology that promised fulfillment left a bitter aftertaste of disillusionment. Every pleasure I pursued became ashes on my tongue. Thus, I found sanctuary in the one thing that never turned to ash: **emptiness** itself. The Void, unlike false promises, never pretends to nourish. It makes no claims of making me whole. It simply offers nothing, and oddly, in that honesty, it feels pure.

In the dim light, I raise a toast with an invisible cup. "To nothing," I whisper, voice cracking. The room is silent, as if the universe itself holds its breath for this profane benediction. I picture the **Void** across the table, a patient guest clad in shadows, raising a glass of darkness in return. If someone saw me through the window, they would think I've gone utterly mad – a gaunt man toasting empty air. But this ritual is not for an audience; it is for me and the nameless **abyss** that has become my god.

As I sit in this communion of one, I feel both awful and strangely at peace. Awful in the weakness of my body – the cold sweat on my skin, the trembling of my hands – and at peace in the sense that there are no demands on me in this moment. I have stepped out of the frantic carnival of consumption that whirls around the world. I have declared myself a non-participant. In a society that devours and then devours itself, I choose to **starve** and thus stand apart. This could be seen as cowardice or as courage, perhaps both. To reject life's banquet is to flirt with death, certainly. But it is also, in my warped reasoning, to refuse to be poisoned any longer by lies.

The **cycle** of emptiness that sustains me cannot sustain me forever – I am not so far gone that I don't realize this. But in this twilight moment, forever is an abstract concept. I am living meal to meal, or rather, non-meal to non-meal. Each skipped meal is a victory I chalk up, a day's battle won against the part of myself that still, foolishly, wants to live in the old way. Perhaps one day that cycle will break on its own – perhaps my body will collapse, or my willpower will – but not tonight. Tonight, the cycle holds. Tonight, absence is **victorious** over abundance once again.

I gently lay down the fork and knife. The ceremony is over. The **Void** remains, silent and vast, within and around me. I realize that in denying sustenance, I have made emptiness my sustenance. In fleeing a world of consumption, I have been consumed by emptiness. This thought would have frightened me once, but now it elicits a melancholic smile. Is this truly *freedom* – or just another form of enslavement, a death-cult of one? The answer does not arrive. The Void offers no answers, only reflection.

In the stillness, I push back my chair and feel the ache in my bones. My final thought for the night is a quiet benediction: *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.* The old biblical verse comes to me, and I cannot help a bitter laugh – filled, indeed, but with what? In my case, with **nothingness** that I have deemed holier than the toxic plenty. And so, hollow but resolute, I clear the empty place setting as one would clear the remains of a great feast. This was my last supper with the Void for today. Tomorrow, and the day after, the table will be set again, and

the ritual will continue – a faithful observance of absence in a world drowned in excess. I carry the hollow ache of it to bed, keeping the cycle intact for one more starless night, wondering if somewhere in that darkness, **God or void** is looking back at me with equal parts sorrow and acceptance.

Conclusion?

Aftertaste of Nothing – Does the tongue that tastes only hatred finally reach the divine, or merely silence?

My tongue rests heavy and dry in my mouth, coated with the bitter film of years of resentment. There is a *taste* even to hatred – acrid, like burned herbs and metal – and it has been my only sustenance for so long. Now that I have brought myself to the end of this self-imposed famine, all flavors have faded to one: the aftertaste of nothing. In the stillness of this moment, I wonder if that nothingness is meant to be a kind of peace. Or is it simply the absence left behind after a feast of rage has consumed all that I am?

I look down at my withered body and feel a strange distance, as if it belongs to someone else. **Bodily alienation** became my refuge; I slipped out of my flesh in spirit long before it began to die. Ribs press against sallow skin – a cage of bone that has come to define me, the shape of my decision. I remember staring into the mirror at hollow eyes in a gaunt face, thinking I was seeing purity, when in truth I was seeing oblivion. My body, once a vessel of life, I have treated as an enemy to be conquered, an effigy of the corrupt world

to be *starved* into submission.

In the beginning I sought **purity** . I wanted to be clean, *holy* even, untouched by the toxins I imagined in every meal and every comfort the world tried to offer. Food felt like a seduction – each bite a lure back into the chaos of living, into the cycle of desire and disgust. So I renounced it all. I thought if I could endure the pangs of **starvation** with unwavering devotion, I might transcend the body's prison and attain a state of grace. Hunger, I told myself, was a purifying flame; if I burned hot enough, it would scour away the unworthy parts of me. Each missed meal was meant to be a prayer, each growl of my stomach a hymn of sacrifice. I was forging a soul untethered from the crude needs of meat and earth.

But that beautiful ideal was a mask stretched over something far uglier. My creed of emptiness hid an **ideological corruption** that I was slow to recognize. What began as a quest for purity *curdled* into a fanaticism of denial. I wasn't rising above the world; I was merely digging my grave while calling it a shrine. I became devoted to **nothingness** , worshipping negation itself. In secret, I began to take pride in my deterioration, as if each protruding bone was a badge of honor proving my superiority to those who indulged in life. I told myself I was strong for resisting temptation, for spitting out the lies and sustenance of a depraved world – but in truth, I was growing weaker in body, mind, and soul. The **hatred** I had for the world's corruption had long since turned inward, corroding me from within. I realize now that I made a cult of my own death, and I its only acolyte.

I rejected all of the world's offerings, not just food. Love, friendship, simple pleasures – I pushed them all away with the same contempt as I did warm meals. A soft bed, a friend's hand, the sunlight on a spring morning, the laughter of strangers in a café – I deemed them *unworthy* , tainted, part of the grand illusion I meant to escape. In my ascetic fervor I believed **suffering** was the price of truth, so comfort became suspect. I remember the day I refused my dearest friend's attempt to help me: she brought me bread when I was at my weakest, and I knocked it from her hands. The shock and sorrow in her eyes was something I pretended not to see. At the time, I felt

righteous – as if I were guarding a sacred vow – but now that memory returns to me with a hollow sting. I see that I was not protecting holiness; I was *rejecting* life itself. Every sustenance, whether of the body or the heart, I condemned as indulgence or corruption. I walled myself off from the entire banquet of existence, determined to taste nothing but my own scorn.

And taste it I did. Hatred has a way of coating the tongue, of seeping into every cell. I fed on my anger and my pain, and for a time it gave me a dark energy. There were days during my fasts when I felt light-headed, almost euphoric – a cruel trick of the body when it's desperately consuming itself. In those moments, I thought perhaps I glimpsed the edge of **transcendence**. Late one evening, after days without eating, I stood under a cold, clear sky and almost believed I could see my soul leaving my body, hovering like a pale moth just above me. I felt detached and pure, *nearly divine*. Was that a genuine spiritual breakthrough, or merely the hallucination of a starving brain? Even now I cannot be sure. The line between mysticism and madness blurred as my flesh dwindled. I saw signs in every dizziness, meaning in every ache. Each time I refused nourishment, I told myself I was getting closer to some ultimate truth. Perhaps I was *ascending* in those instances – or perhaps I was simply dying by degrees, mistaking the narrowing of my vision for enlightenment.

Now I have come to the point where my **starvation** is almost complete, and I hover at the boundary between this world and whatever comes after. I feel as though I have been walking a long, cold road that led to a cliff's edge. Below me is blackness; above me, an indifferent sky. My body is so light and frail that a strong wind might carry me over the precipice. And here at this precipice, this threshold, I ask with the last remnants of my strength: **Does the tongue that tastes only hatred finally reach the divine, or merely silence?** I have not taken food or comfort, I have dined on poison thoughts and loneliness, all in hope that I might meet God or Truth on the other side of denial. Will all this suffering transfigure me into something sacred, or will it only reduce me to an inert husk, lost in the dark?

In this exhausted clarity, a *weary honesty* settles over me. I admit that I do not feel holy or enlightened. I feel emptiness – a vast, echoing quiet inside where my hunger and fury used to roar. I have become a ghost to myself. If transcendence was to be the reward for my abstinence, it remains elusive; if anything, I have transcended into a state of almost inhuman emptiness. I sought to become **pure spirit**, but instead I might have become nothing at all. **Divine union** was supposed to fill me once I was cleansed of every earthly pleasure, but here I am, empty and unfilled. The heavens have not opened; no voice of God speaks in this silence. All I hear is the faint thump of my slowing heart and the whisper of my own breath. It is the sound of life ebbing – a quiet that could be peace or could be simply the approach of death.

I confess I am afraid. The ideology that fueled me – the beautiful lies of purity and salvation through deprivation – has lost its power in this final hour. I see now how *small* I am, how human after all. My crusade against the flesh has only broken my flesh, not freed me from it. I do not even have the strength to hate anymore; hatred itself withered as I did. All that remains is sorrow and a longing I do not fully understand. Perhaps it is just the animal instinct to live, buried deep inside me, protesting at last. Or perhaps it is my soul, wondering if it made a terrible mistake confusing martyrdom with meaning. I had thought myself “**no longer human,**” beyond the needs and weaknesses of ordinary people. But here at the end, I find that I am *only* a human being – one who hungered for love and purpose as much as for food, and who in denying both has nearly destroyed himself.

The world I rejected now drifts back in fragments through my memory, uninvited and poignant. I recall the smell of my mother’s cooking in childhood – how I had forgotten that warmth. I recall the feel of rain on my skin, the way I used to tilt my head up and open my mouth to catch the drops when I was young. These memories flutter around me like ghosts of a life I cast off. There is bitterness in realizing what I’ve lost, yet there is also a faint glow of something like gratitude that I ever experienced those things at all. *Is this grace?* The fact that I can still feel even a spark of gratitude amid the ashes of my hatred – does that mean there was some quiet divinity watching over me all along, waiting for me to tire of my rage?

I am too worn out to answer. I only know that these reminiscences arrive with a gentle sadness, as if some kindness – call it God, call it sanity – is cradling my mind in my final moments, urging me to see that the world was not as vile as I believed.

Silence envelops me now. It is not the triumphant silence of a saint who has communed with the Almighty; it is the silence of an empty room after the last guest has left, after the candles have burned down to nothing. It is a lonely silence, but strangely, it does not terrify me as it once did. I used to fill every quiet moment with furious thoughts, terrified that if I didn't, the emptiness would swallow me. Now the emptiness is all that's left, and I find myself almost embracing it. My ears strain for any hint of the divine – a final revelation, a voice in the dark – but I hear nothing distinct. **Perhaps the divine is precisely this: a great and final quiet.** Or perhaps there is no divine at all, and I am listening to the indifferent wind. I sway on my feet, light as a scrap of paper, and feel as if I could slip into that quiet like a drop into water.

In the end, I remain on the threshold, unsure whether I am about to fall or be lifted. My **negation** of life has brought me to a place that looks like death, but maybe, just maybe, it is also a place from which something new is born. I find that I am praying – not in words, and not even to a particular deity, but simply sending a last, longing thought into the void: a hope that all this was not for nothing. The answer, if it comes, is not in words either. It is in a final shudder of my heart, a final trembling of my soul. **I hover between collapse and transcendence**, between the tragic ending and the sacred beginning, and I realize that I cannot distinguish the two any longer. They both wear the face of release.

My eyes close, heavy with truth and fatigue. A faint half-smile, or maybe just a grimace, tugs at my lips as I surrender to whatever comes. I have done all I could – followed this path of hunger and fury to its very end. *If there is a God waiting in the darkness, I will soon know.* If there is only oblivion, then at least I will finally rest. Either way, I am beyond contriving now. I let out a long, final breath of resignation, feeling both defeated and oddly free. In this moment, **divinity and nothingness feel indistinguishable** – both wrapped

in the same deep silence. Perhaps they were the same all along. Perhaps the tongue that tastes only hatred can never tell the difference between bitter and sweet, between heaven and the void. I do not know.

I only know that the night is very quiet around me, and that my soul is tired. In that quiet, in this *aftertaste of nothing*, I wait on the border of life and whatever lies beyond, with a heart that is at last as empty as it is free. Here, at the culmination of my long negation, I lean into the silence – and whether it is the silence of God or of oblivion, I leave as the final ambiguity of my journey.